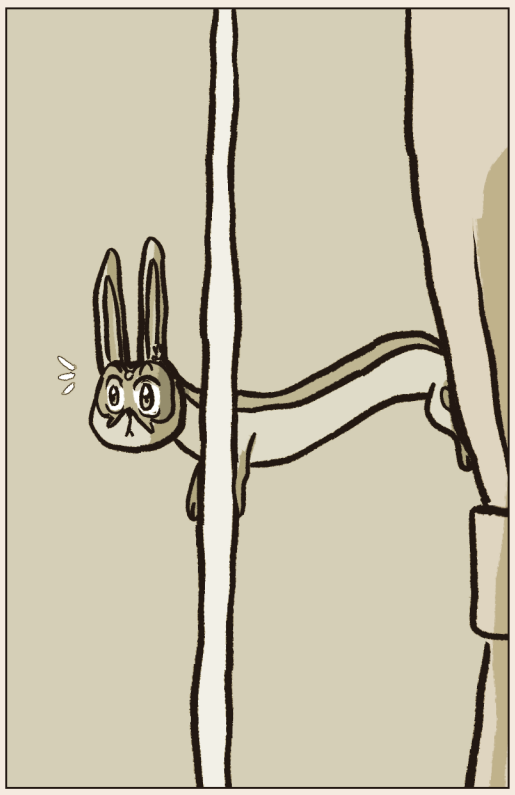
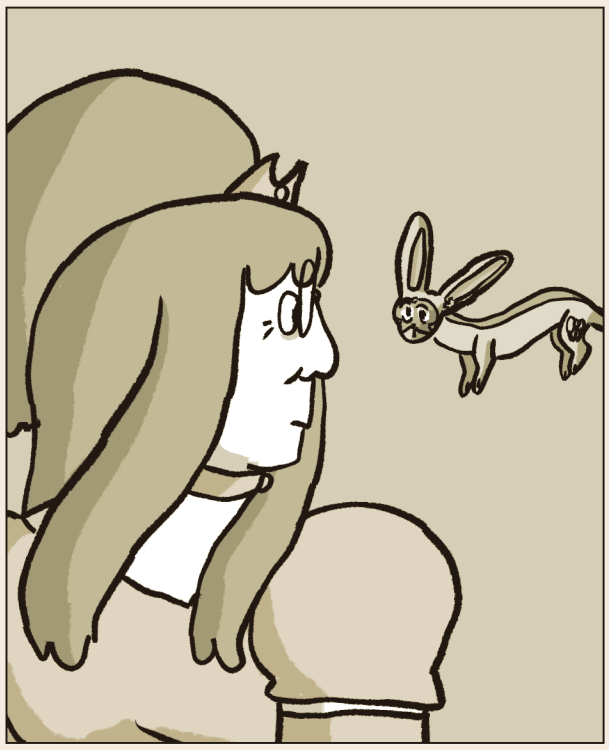
CHAPTER 6





HI.

...HI.

UM... THE HOPELESS HASN'T MOVED FROM WHERE YOU LAST LEFT IT.

OH.
THAT'S GOOD.

I DON'T THINK IT'S HURT ANYONE EITHER.

GOOD,
GOOD.

HAVE YOU, UM,

MADE ANY PROGRESS?

I... HAVEN'T.

I'M TRYING!

I'M TRYING SO HARD, BUT DECODING THESE GLYPHS IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT SOME KIND OF CIPHER, OR SOMEONE WHO KNOWS WHAT IT SAYS. I-

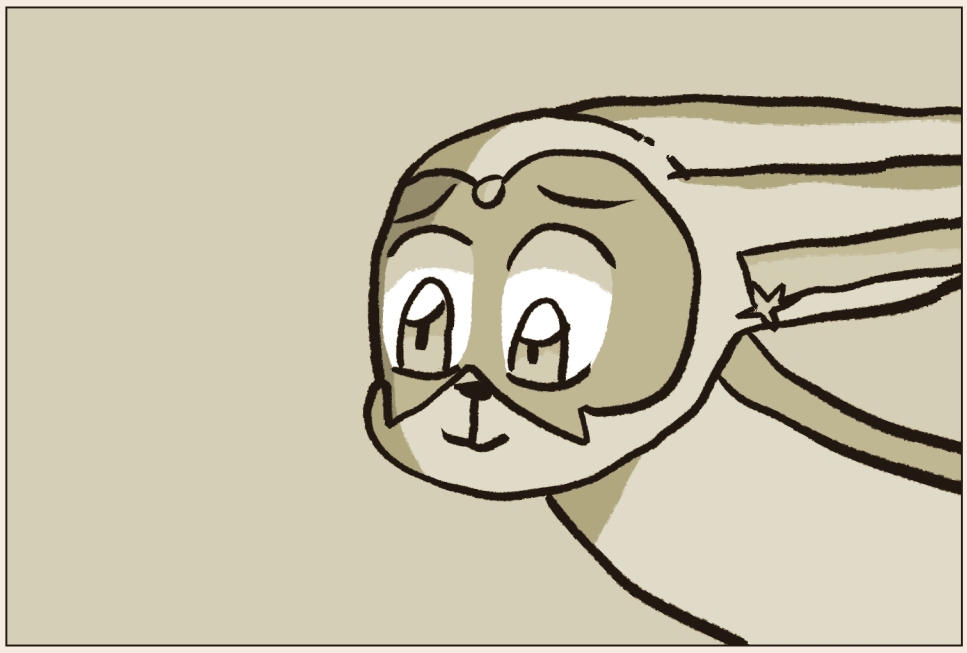
scoot

TOPAZ, I NEED YOU FOR THIS. PLEASE, STAY AND HELP ME. IF IT DOESN'T WORK, WE'LL DO IT YOUR WAY, BUT I NEED YOU TO TRY WITH ME.

CYRUS, I...

OKAY. I'LL HELP YOU. I PROMISE, I'LL DO MY BEST.

THANK YOU.
I TRUST YOU.



DING

UGH, I REALLY DON'T NEED ANY DISTRACTIONS RIGHT NOW-

Sophie
You doing any...

WELL... I COULD DO WITH A SMALL DISTRACTION.

unread

You doing anything later?

I REALLY SHOULD TELL HER I'M BUSY...

Sorry, but I |

TOPAZ IS BACK, I SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE SOME HEADWAY WITH TRANSLATING THESE GLYPHS, AND HOPEFULLY SAVING THAT STRANGER.

BUT I'VE BEEN AT THIS FOR NEARLY THREE DAYS STRAIGHT, MY BODY MAY NOT FEEL TIRED, BUT I'LL GO CRAZY IF I STARE AT THIS BOOK ANY LONGER.

ou doing
ything later?

I'm free. Do you have something in mind?

I'M GOING TO TAKE A LITTLE BREAK FROM THIS.

WH-WHAT? BUT WE SHOULD SOLVE THIS AS SOON AS WE CAN!

I KNOW. BUT WE COULD HAVE DONE IT SOONER IF YOU HADN'T RUN OFF.

LISTEN, HOW ABOUT YOU COME WITH ME?

YOU CAN STUDY THE BOOK WHILE YOU'RE IN MY BAG.

nod

GOOD. DON'T WORRY, I DON'T THINK WE'LL BE OUT ALL NIGHT.

YOU DON'T THINK?

OKAY, FINE, WE WON'T BE OUT ALL NIGHT. I'LL CUT IT OFF SHORT IF IT GETS TOO LATE.

...OKAY. WHERE ARE WE GOING?

DING

I THINK I HAVE A DATE.

THANK YOU.

UM. SORRY WE COULDN'T GO TO A REGULAR BAR. I KIND OF... THE DRESS COMES WITH ME WHEREVER I GO, YOU KNOW?

IT'S NO PROBLEM. I NEED TO USE THIS SPACE MORE, HONESTLY.

HA HA

SORRY IF YOUR CHAIR IS KIND OF DIRTY. I HAVEN'T CLEANED UP HERE RECENTLY.

...IT'S FINE

THIS IS YOUR FIRST REAL DATE! IF YOU MESS THIS UP, YOUR DATING LIFE IS OFFICIALLY OVER!

YOU CAN'T COME BACK FROM THIS FAILURE! YOU'RE ALREADY TOO OLD TO BE INEXPERIENCED, SO THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE!

SO... UHH... WHAT DO YOU. LIKE TO DO?

NORMAL QUESTION! OKAY!

OH, I LIKE TO DO A LOT OF THINGS.

OH FUUUUUCK.

BUT IF YOU'RE ASKING ABOUT HOBBIES, I ACTUALLY LIKE REPAIRING OLD ELECTRONICS. AND CROSS-STITCHING.

...OH!

I... DIDN'T ACTUALLY KNOW THAT ABOUT HER.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN ANCIENT MAGIC, BUT ACTUALLY BEING ABLE TO STUDY IT IS NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE, EVEN WITH THE FIELD I'M IN.

LEARNING ABOUT THE INNER WORKINGS OF OLD TECHNOLOGY IS KIND OF THE NEXT BEST THING. IT HAS IT'S OWN SORT OF MAGIC TO IT, YKNOW?

AND THE CROSS-STITCHING?

I KNOW I DON'T LOOK THE TYPE, BUT IT'S CALMING. YOU CAN MAKE SOME COOL PATTERNS WITH IT.

WHAT ABOUT YOU, SUMMER? WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?

COSTUMING?

OH, UM.

I'M ACTUALLY KIND OF BORING.

I DON'T GET THAT VIBE FROM YOU.

NO, REALLY, I AM.

I MOSTLY JUST READ BOOKS. I ALSO STUDY MAGIC, BUT, UM, LIKE YOU SAID...

IT'S DIFFICULT.

YOU FIGHT MONSTERS.

NOT BY CHOICE.

THEY COME TO ME.

ARE THEY ATTRACTED TO YOUR ARTIFACT, THEN?

OH! YES, ACTUALLY. HOW DID YOU FIGURE?

MONSTERS ARE MAGIC, I'D GUESS THEY NEED SOME WAY TO REFUEL. THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH LATENT MAGIC IN THE ATMOSPHERE, THEY'D BE ENTICED TO SOMETHING THAT CONTAINS ACTIVATED MAGIC.

IT'S WHY THEY DON'T GO AFTER MAGIC ARTIFACTS IN STORAGE. THEY AREN'T ACTIVATED LIKE YOUR BOOK IS. NO ONE KNOWS HOW TO ACTIVATE ARTIFACTS. SO I HAVE ANOTHER QUESTION FOR YOU...

HOW DID YOU ACTIVATE THAT BOOK OF YOURS?

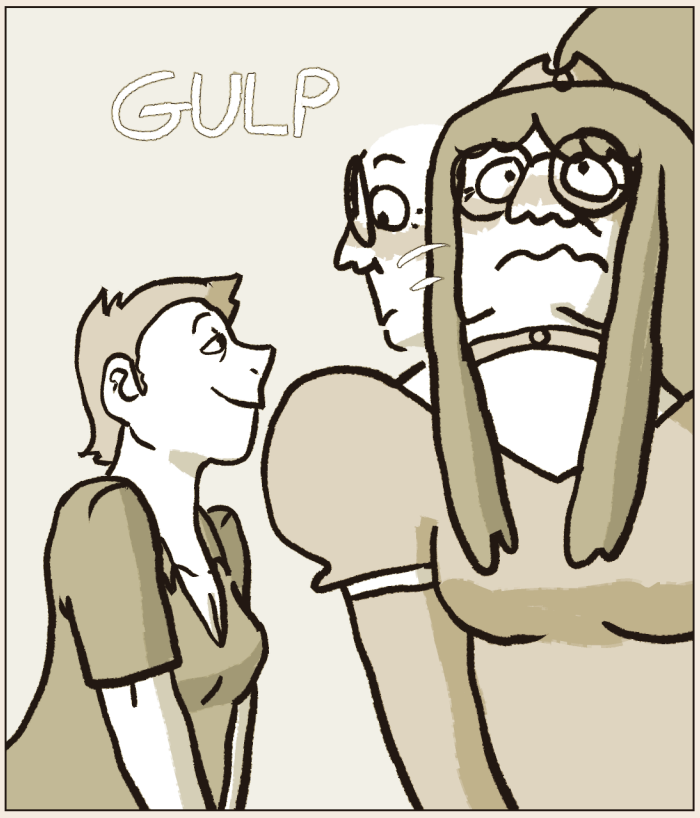
OH!

UHH... WELL, I- I MEAN- IT WAS-

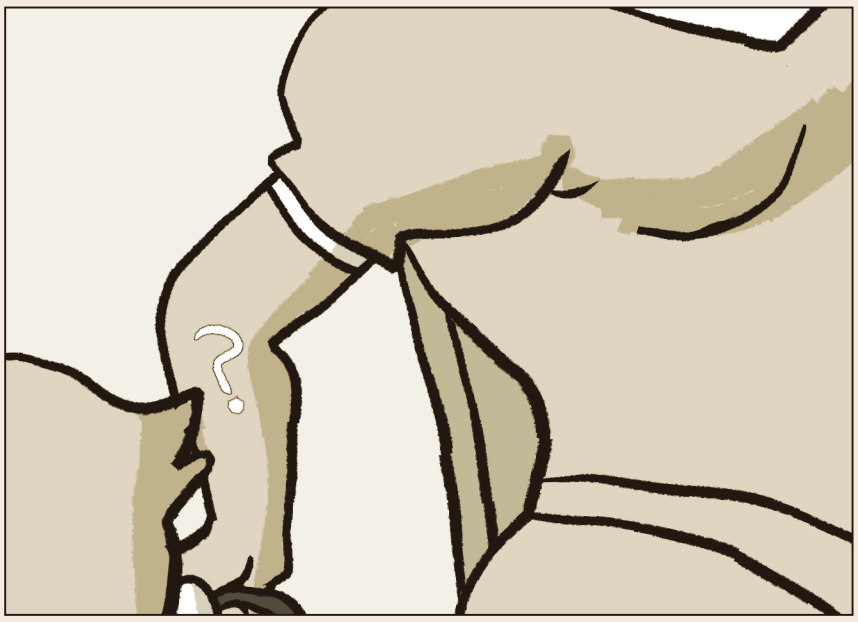
COMPLICATED?

SCOOT

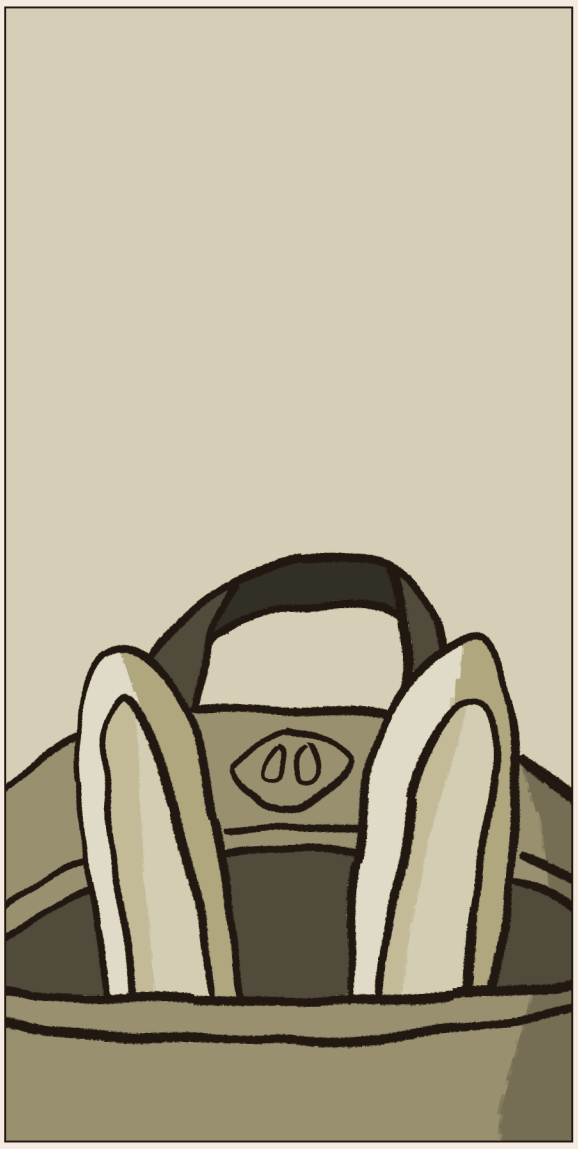
I'M HERE ALL NIGHT.

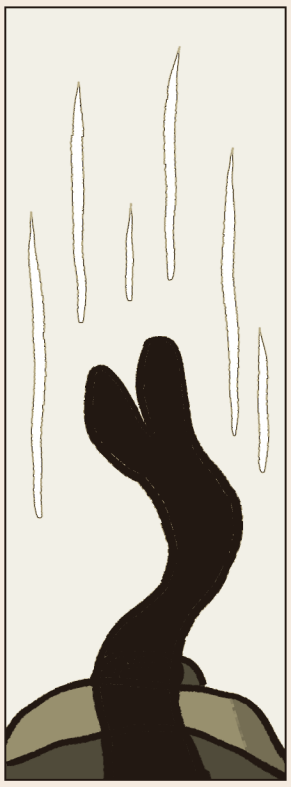

GULP

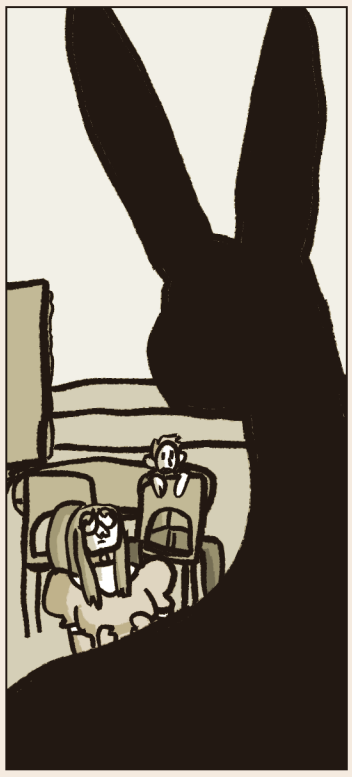
I- I SUPPOSE TELLING SOMEONE ELSE WOULDN'T HURT...


?

YOU CAN COME OUT. IT'S FINE.





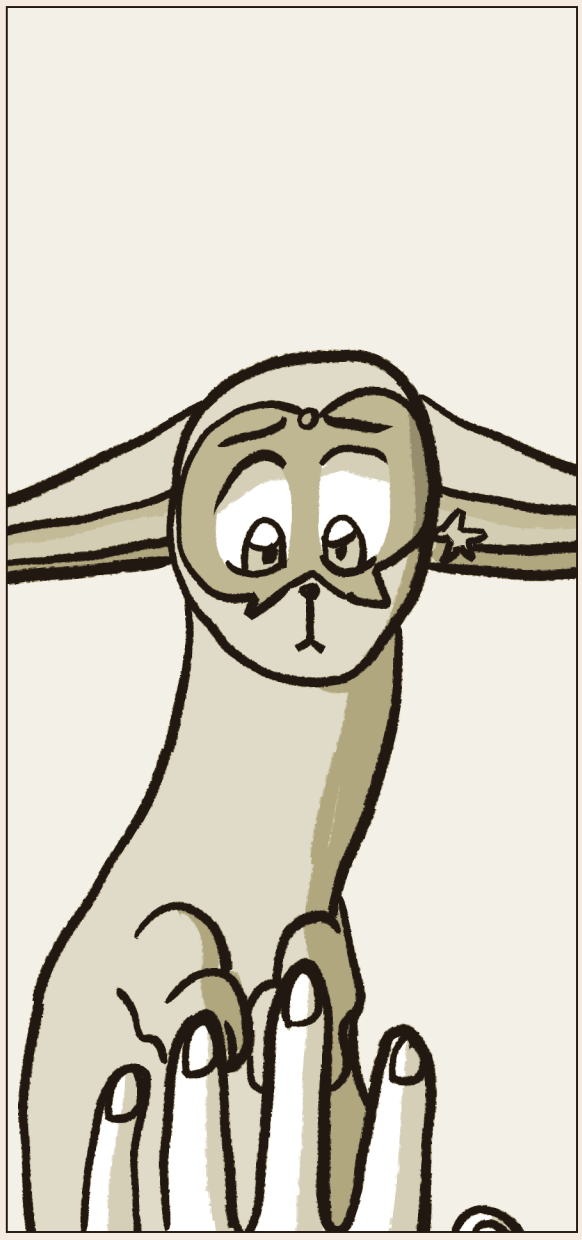


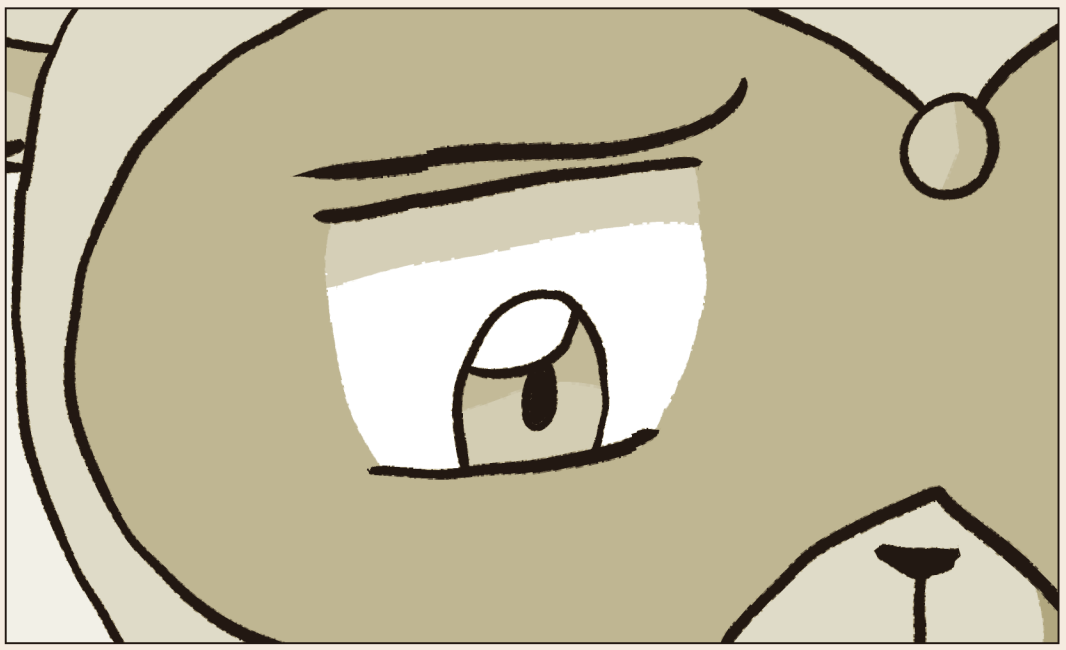
N-NO WAY...
THAT ISN'T A MONSTER, IS IT?

I AM NOT A HOPELESS. I'M A HOMUNCULUS!

IT CAN TALK?!
THIS IS TOPAZ.
THEY CAME OUT OF THE BOOK WHEN I COPIED OVER SOME OF THE GLYPHS.

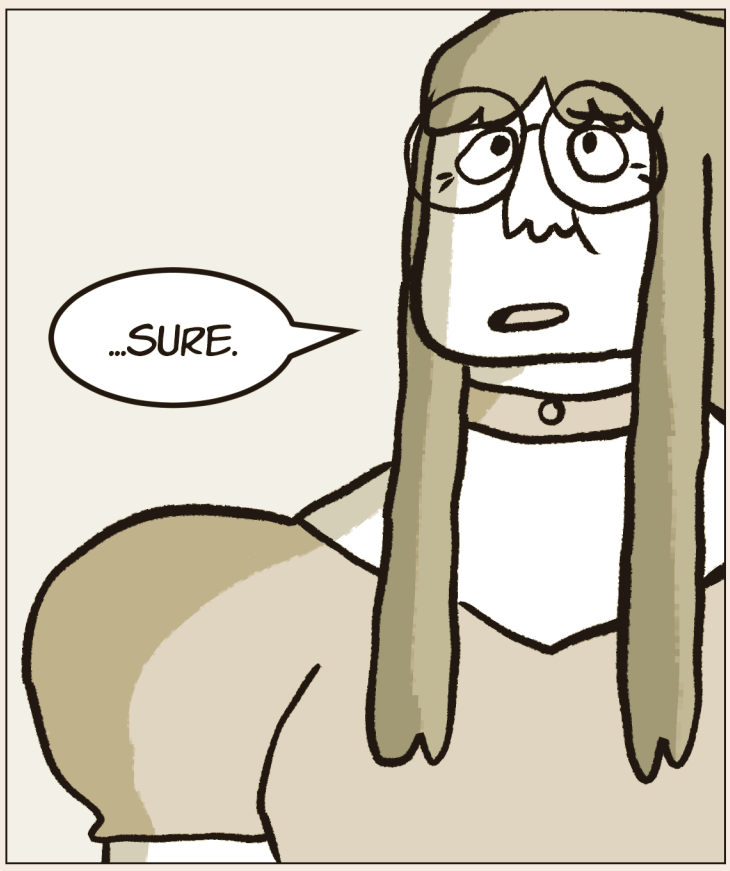
WOW, THAT'S INCREDIBLE! I...



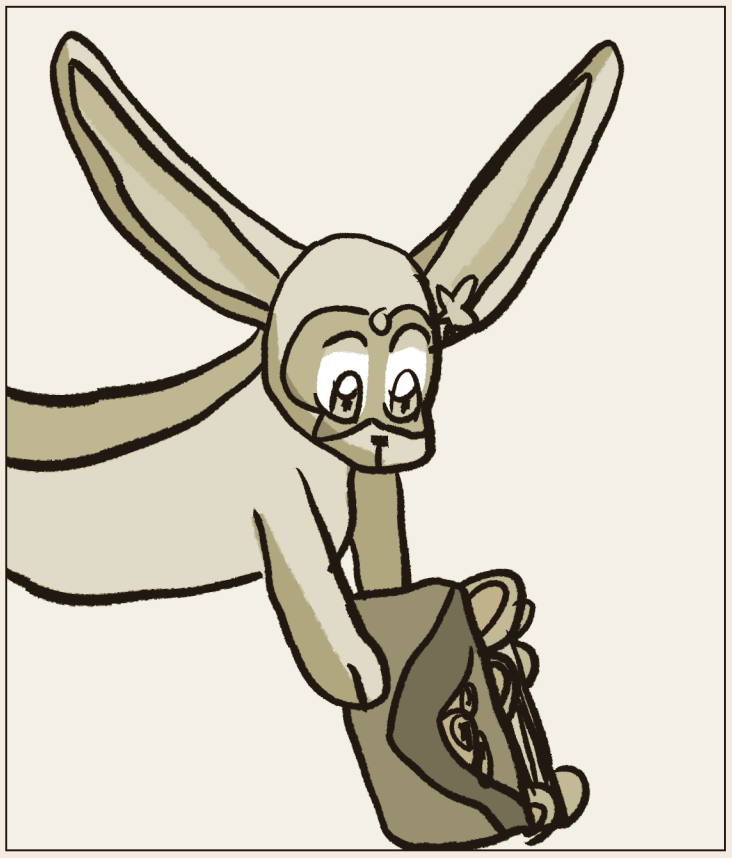


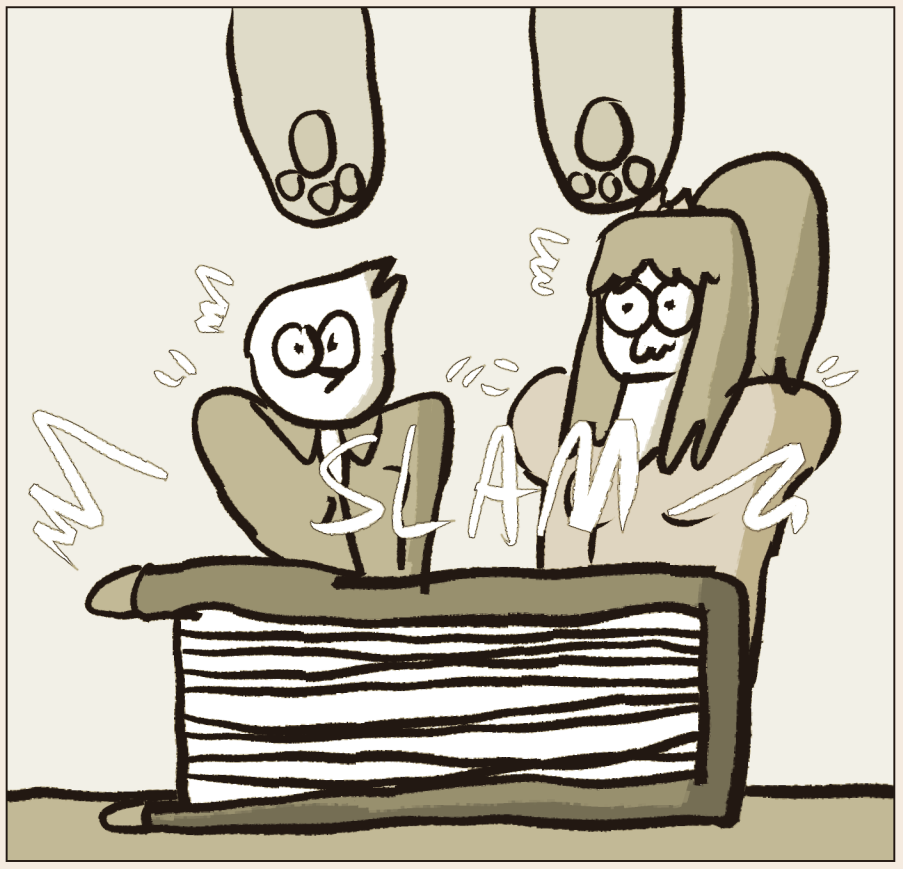
OH, SORRY.
I JUST...

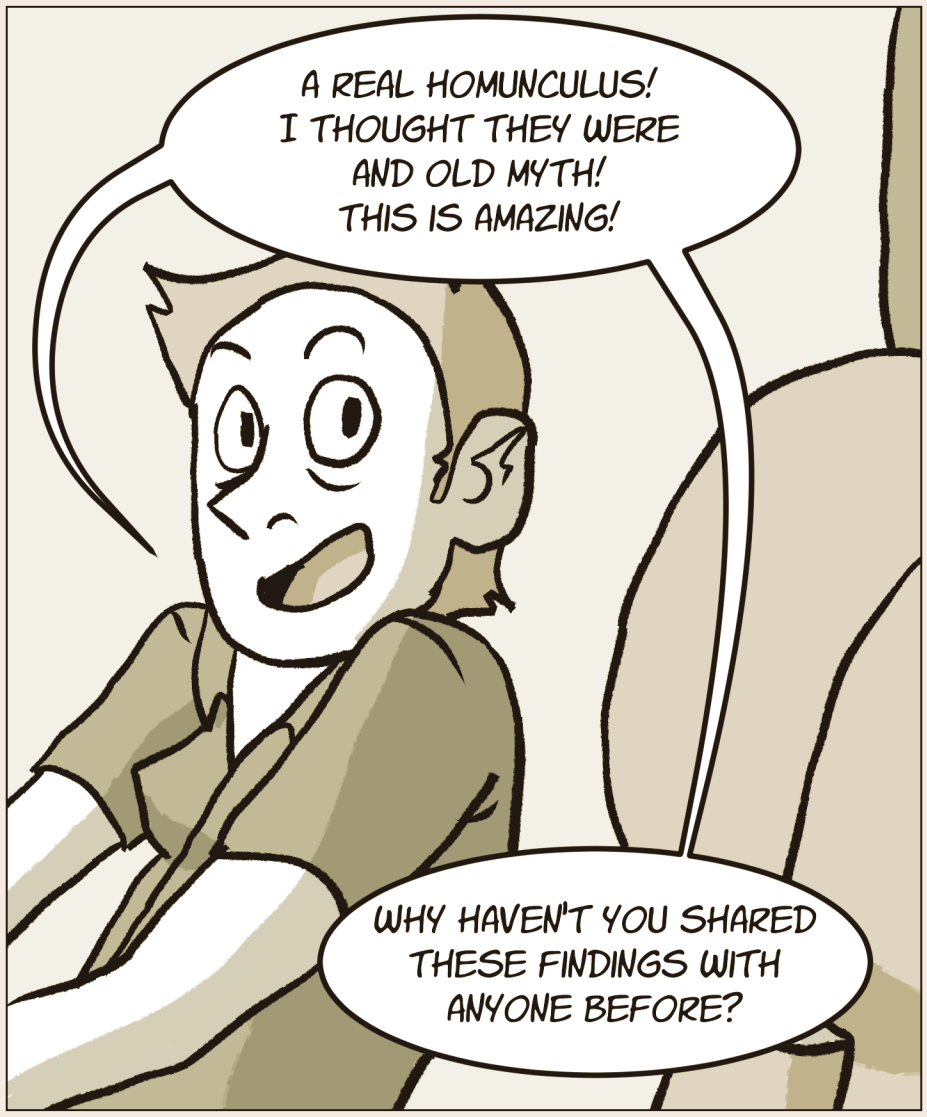
CAN I GO BACK TO LOOKING AT THE BOOK?
I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND ANYTHING.

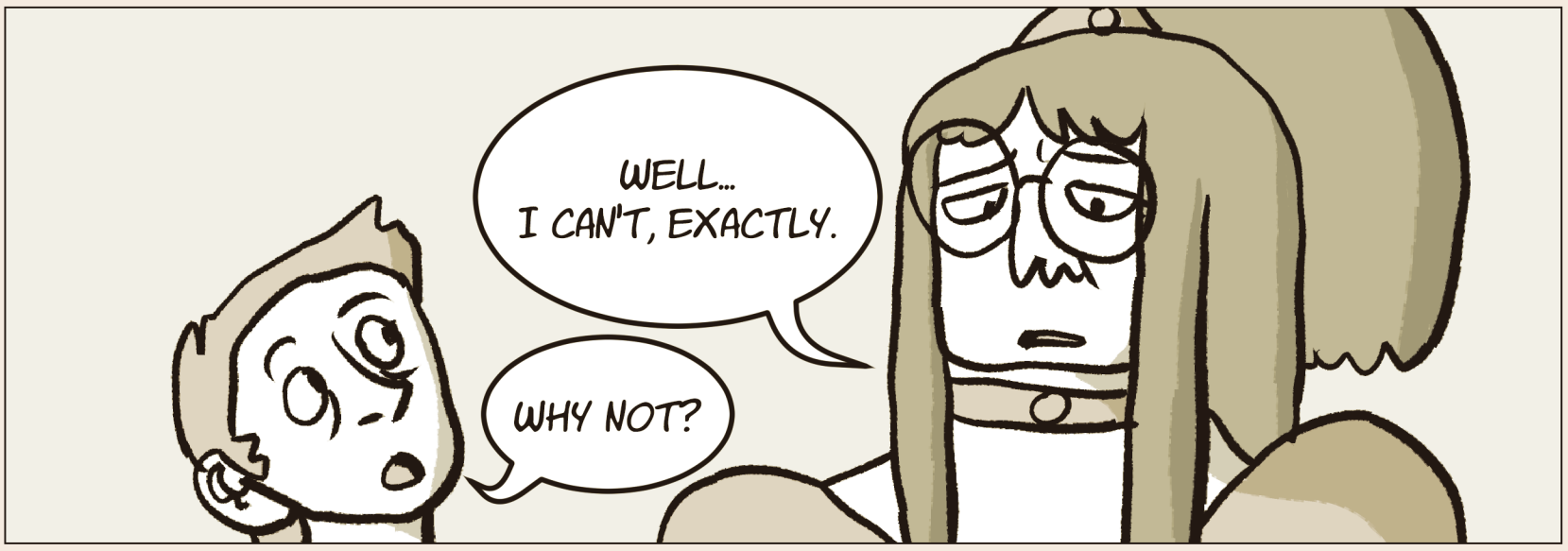

...SURE.

nod
YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIDE IN THE BAG ANYMORE, THOUGH. YOU CAN STUDY IT OUT HERE.




SLAM

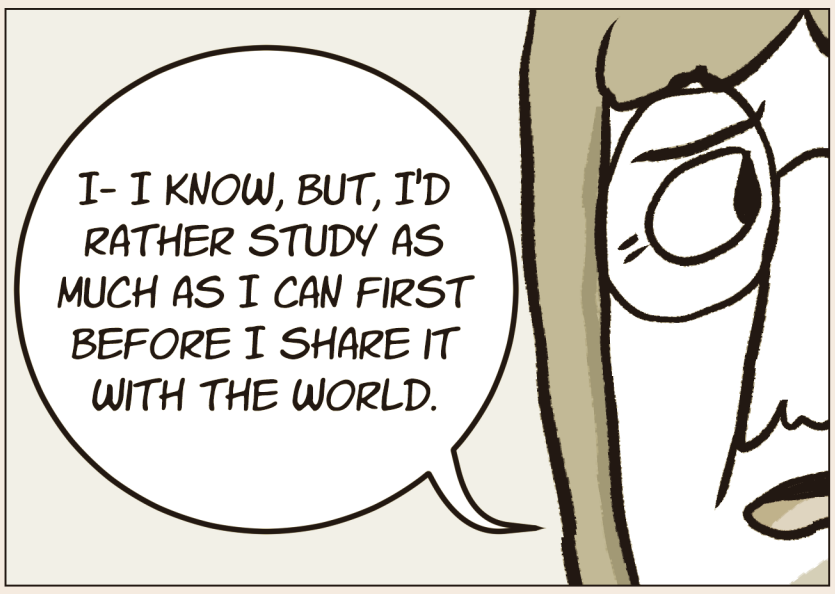

A REAL HOMUNCULUS!
I THOUGHT THEY WERE
AND OLD MYTH!
THIS IS AMAZING!
WHY HAVEN'T YOU SHARED
THESE FINDINGS WITH
ANYONE BEFORE?


WELL...
I CAN'T, EXACTLY.
WHY NOT?

I'D RATHER NOT REVEAL MYSELF...

AND...
I DON'T WANT THEM TO TAKE TOPAZ AWAY...

STILL, THIS COULD BE HUGE FOR THE MAGICAL COMMUNITY! THE FACT THAT HUMANS ARE CAPABLE OF LEARNING MAGIC AGAIN, THAT ARTIFACTS CAN BE ACTIVATED, THAT A *HOMUNCULUS* EXISTS! THESE ARE UNBELIEVABLE FINDS!


I- I KNOW, BUT, I'D RATHER STUDY AS MUCH AS I CAN FIRST BEFORE I SHARE IT WITH THE WORLD.

YEAH, I GET THAT. I'D LOVE TO BE THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNOWS ABOUT THIS STUFF.

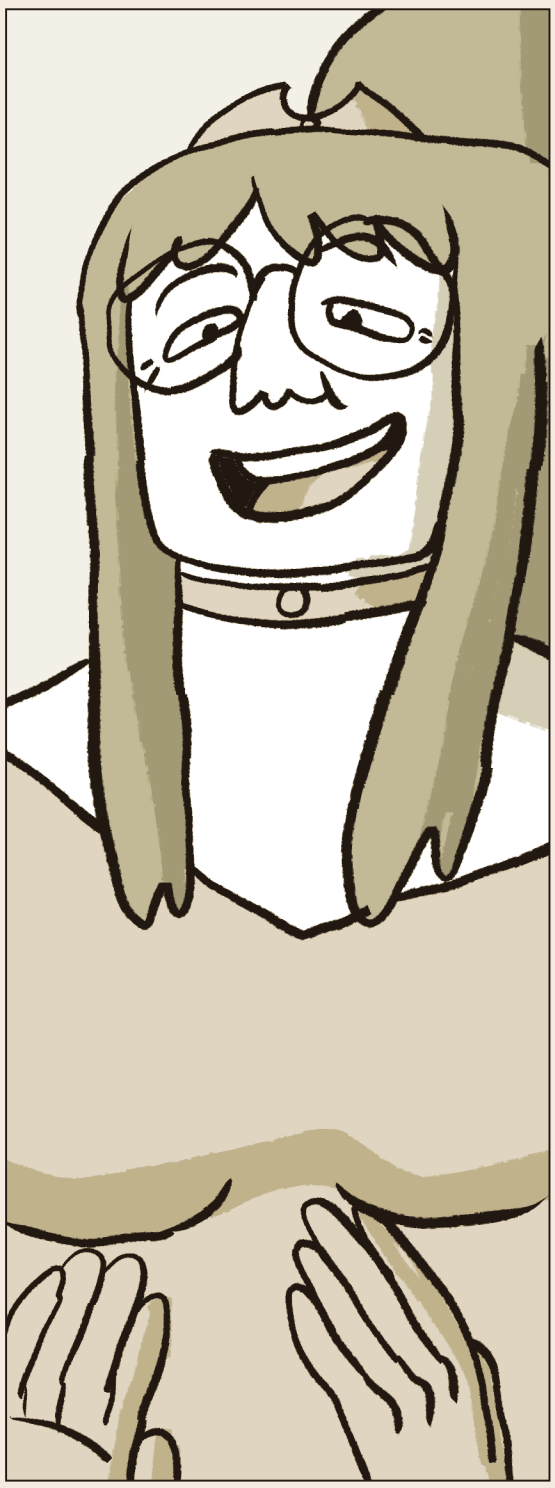
WELL...

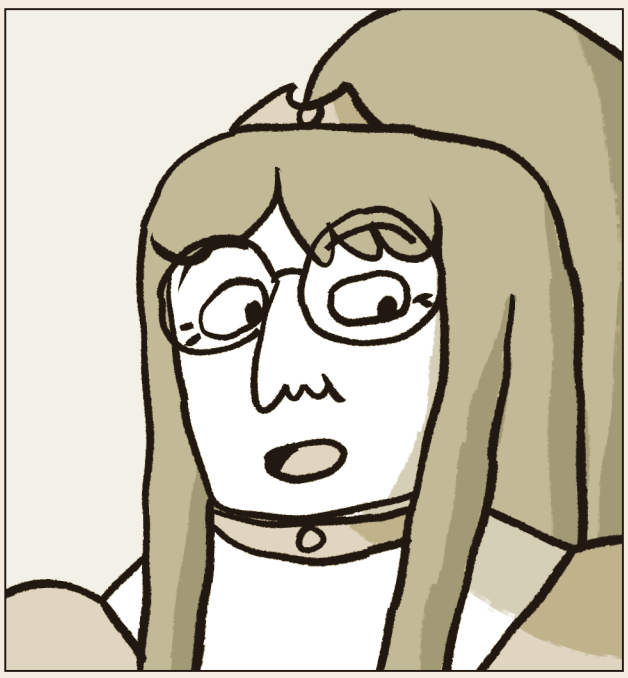
YOU CAN BE THE ONLY *OTHER* PERSON WHO KNOWS ABOUT THIS STUFF.

SO TELL ME MORE! EVERYTHING YOU KNOW!

I PROMISE IT'LL STAY BETWEEN US TWO.

...THREE.
US THREE.





...THAT'S WHEN WE LEARNED THE HOPELESS AREN'T JUST CORRUPTED MAGIC.

I'M...
I'M SCARED,
SOPHIE.

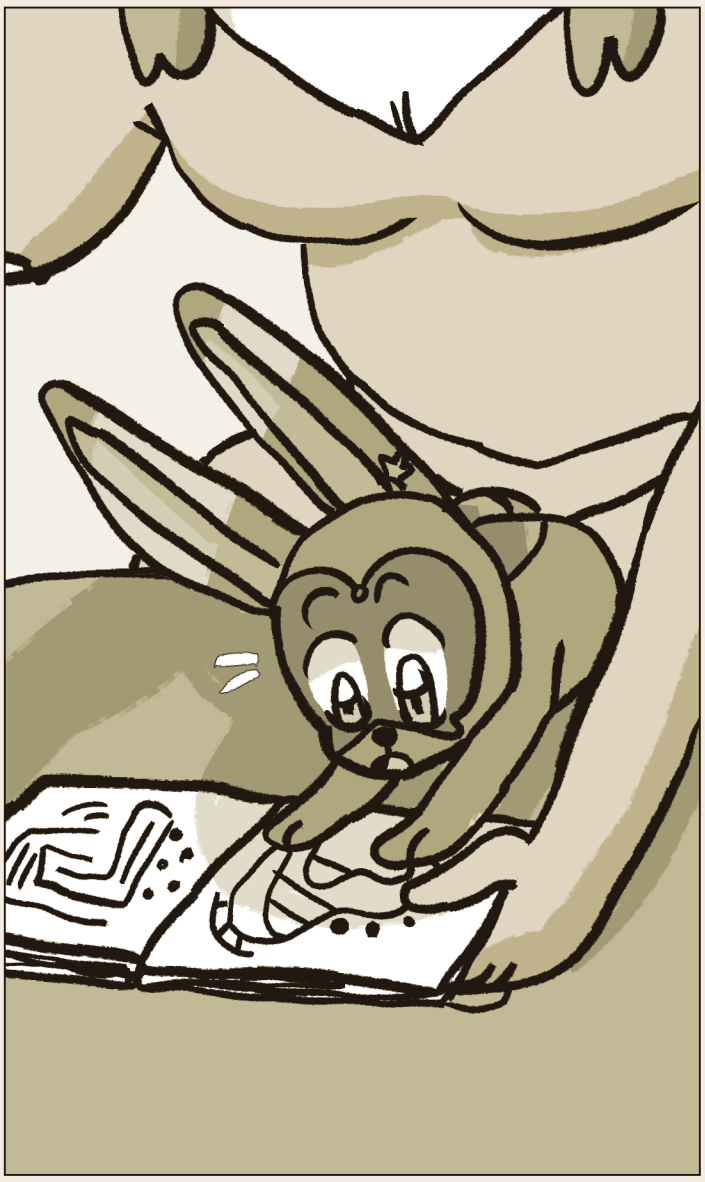
I'M TERRIFIED THAT WE WON'T FIND AN ANSWER TO THIS. THAT I'LL BE STUCK JUST... *KILLING* INNOCENT PEOPLE, BECAUSE WE HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE.

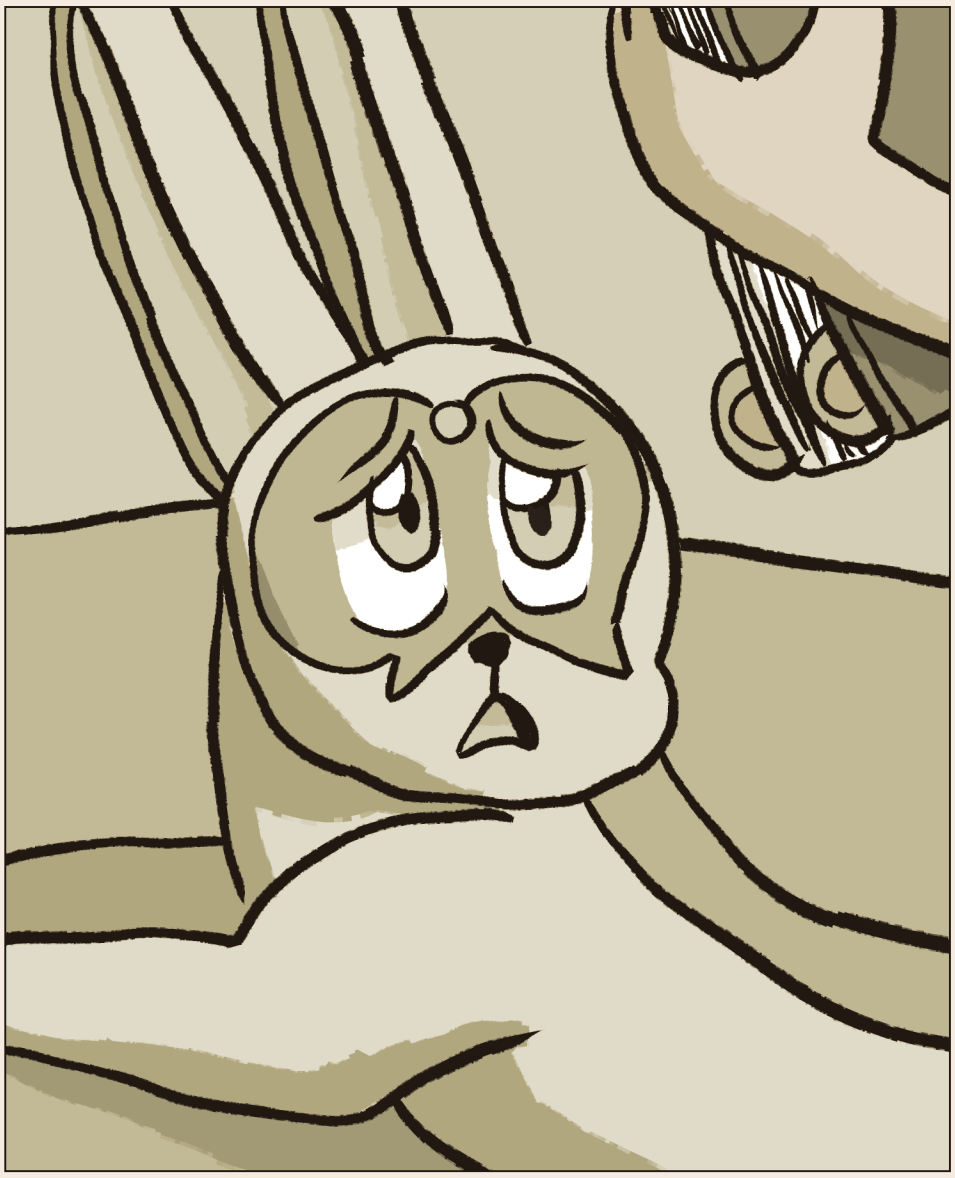
YOU'LL FIND IT.

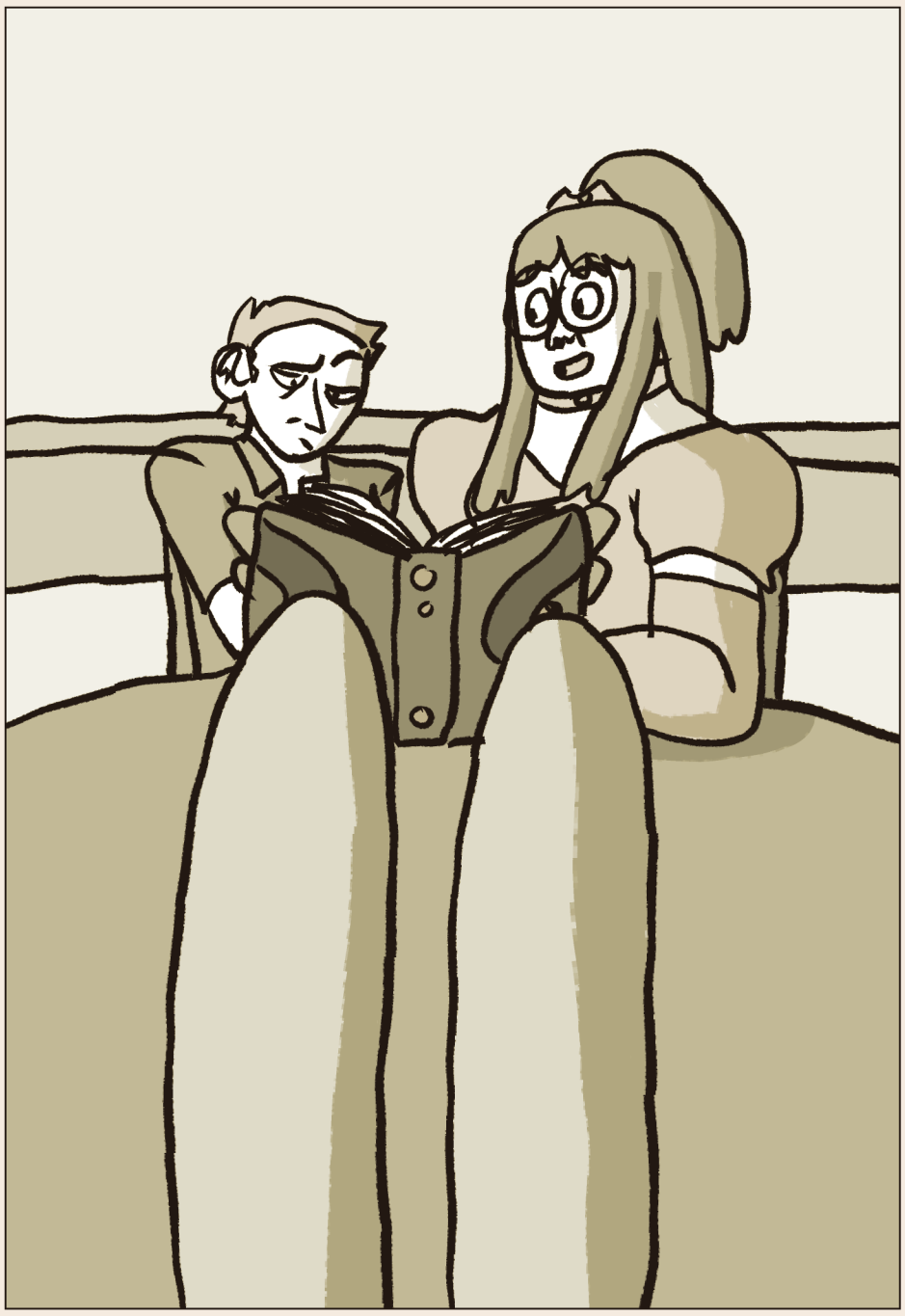
I'LL HELP YOU, IF YOU NEED IT.

YOU MEAN IT?

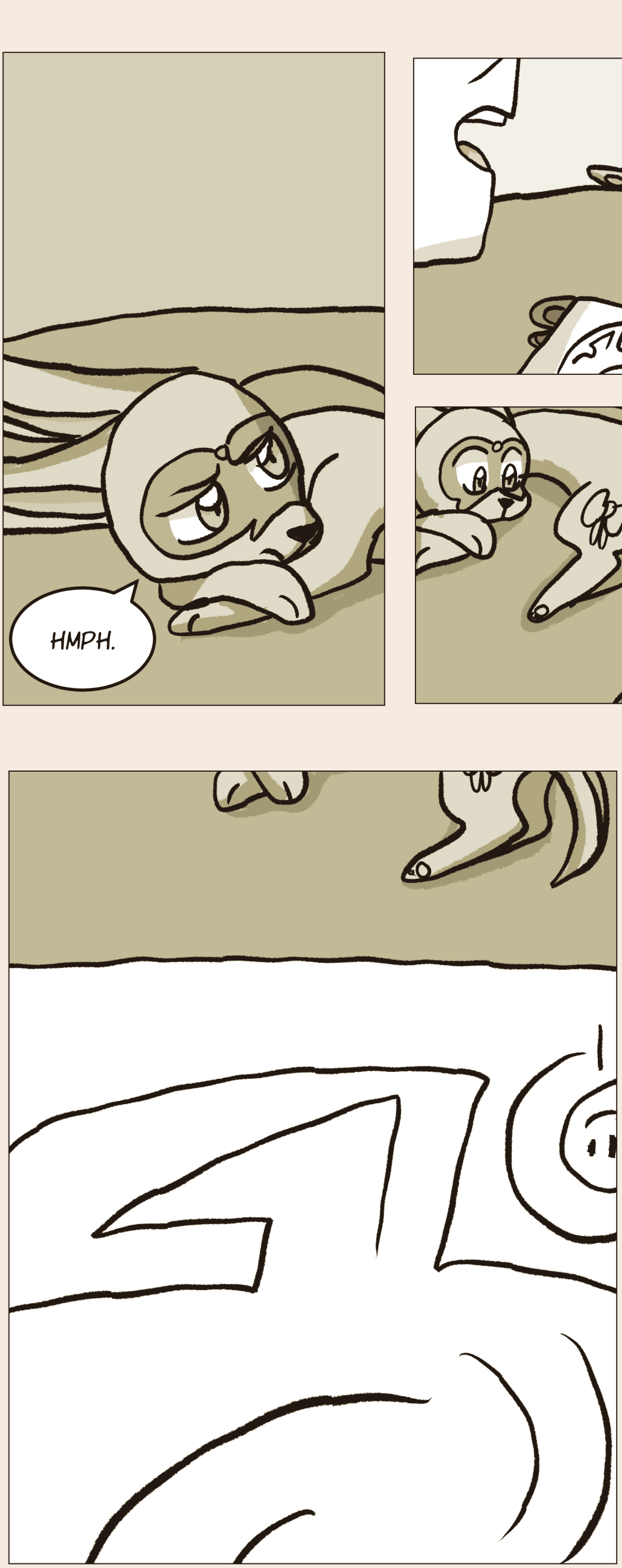
OF COURSE! I'M AN EXPERT ON THIS SUBJECT. WE'RE BOUND TO FIND SOMETHING IF WE WORK TOGETHER.

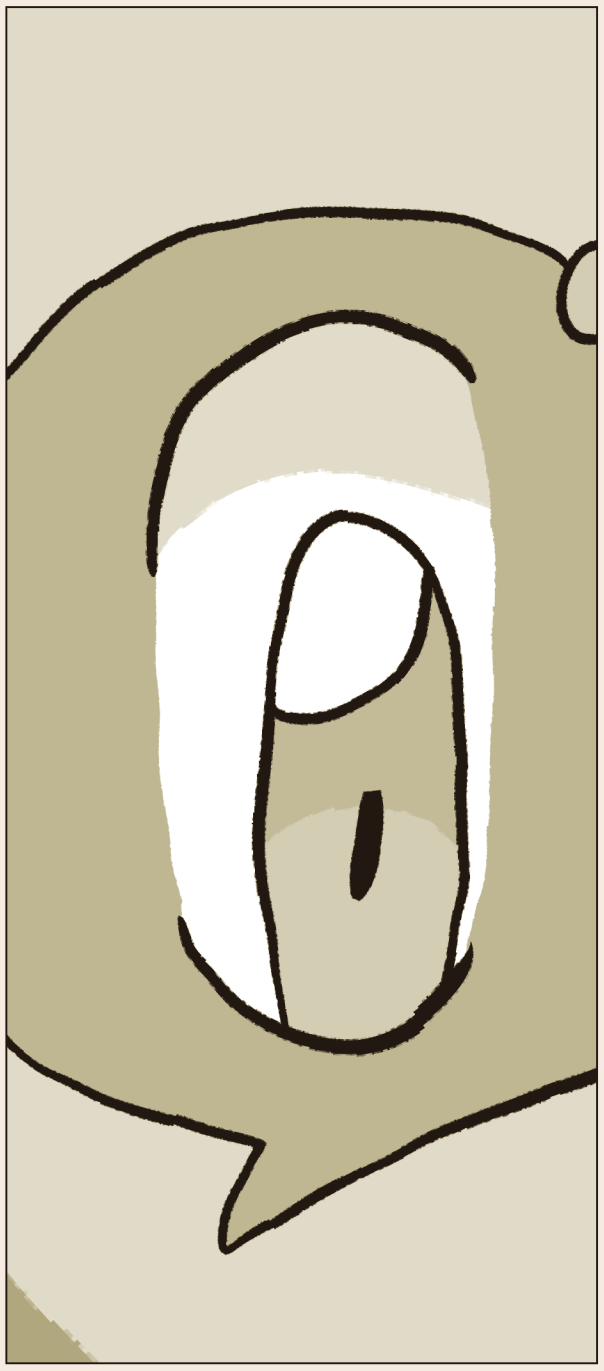


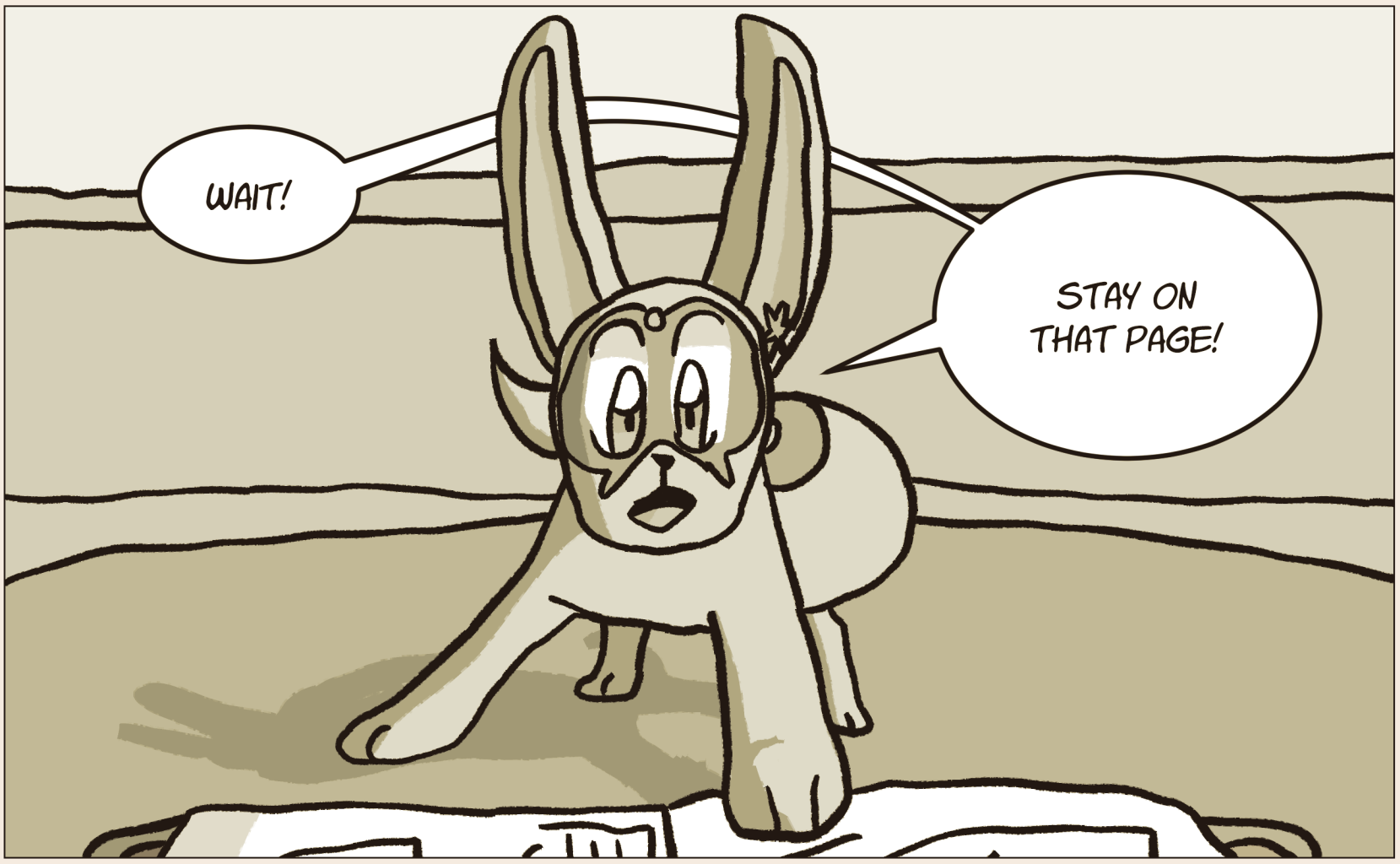


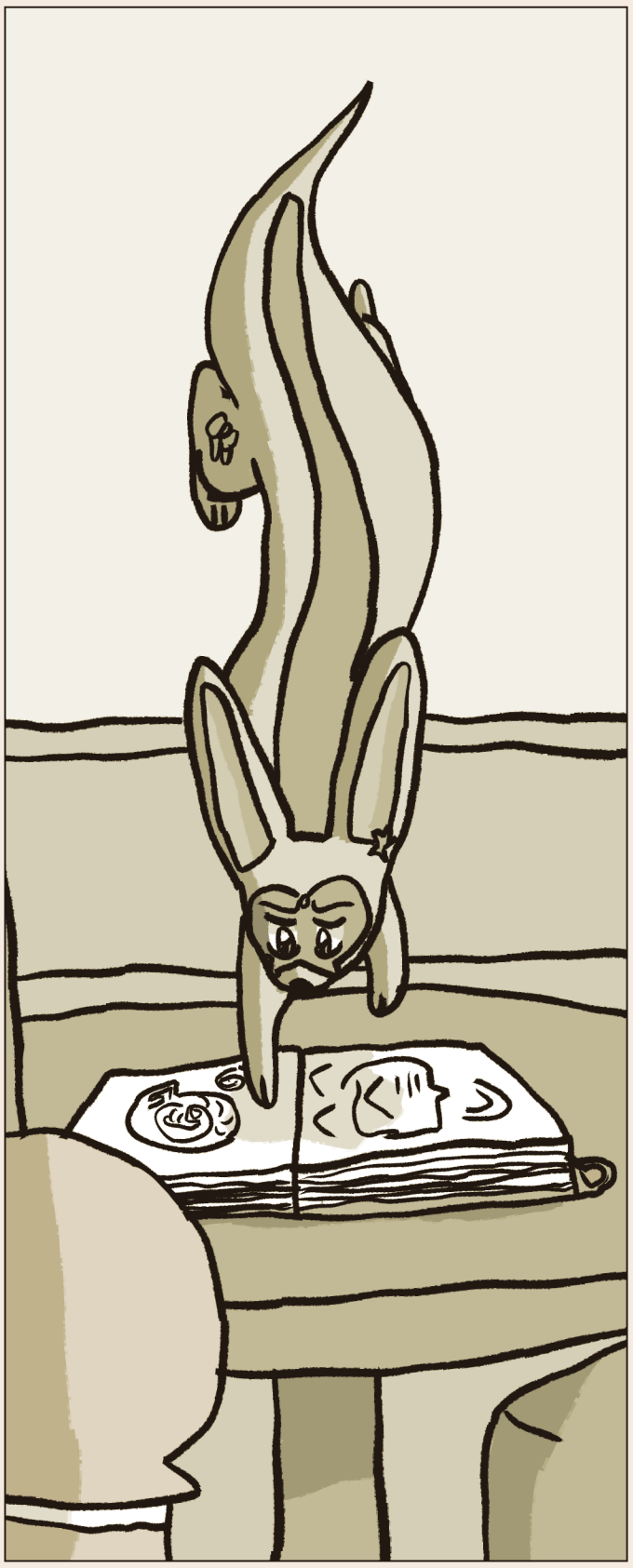


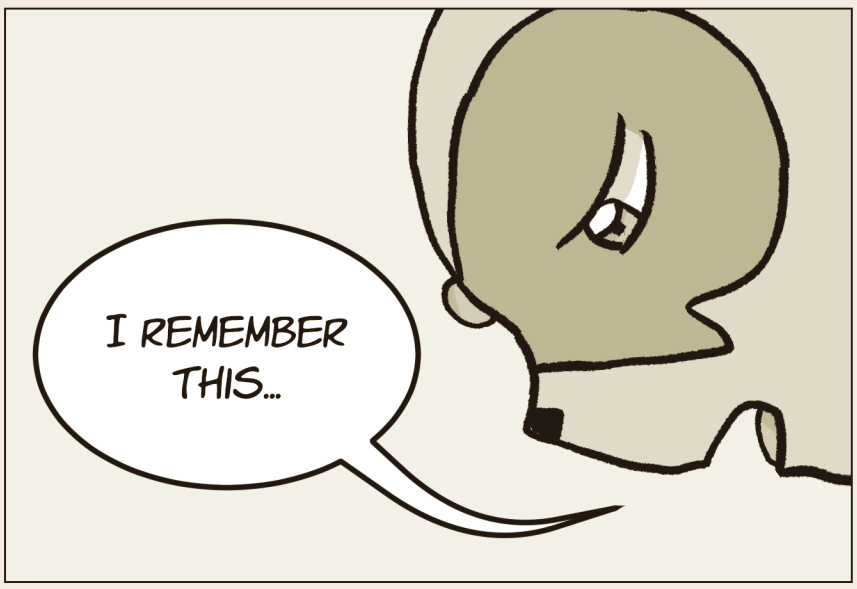
HMPH.

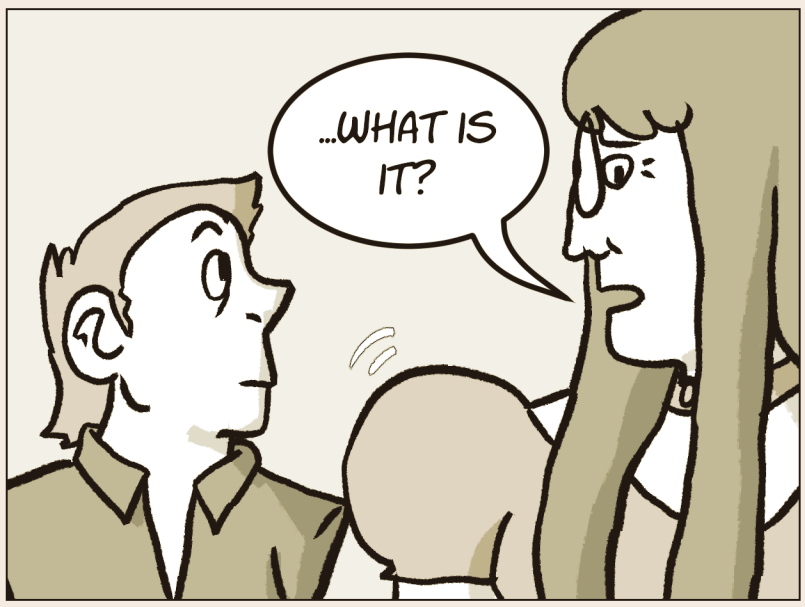


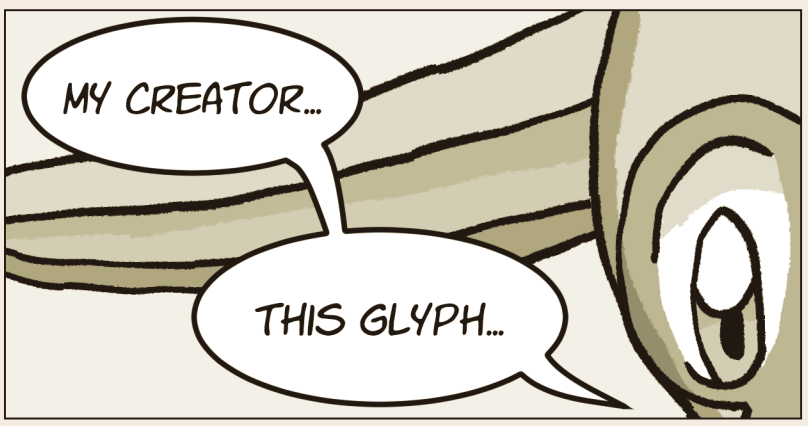



WAIT!
STAY ON THAT PAGE!




I REMEMBER THIS...


...WHAT IS IT?


MY CREATOR...
THIS GLYPH...

IT'S UNFINISHED.

...SO HOW DOES THAT HELP US?

IT HAS THE SYMBOLS FOR "HUMAN" AND "REMOVE MAGIC".

WAIT-

I THOUGHT YOUR CREATOR DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE HOPELESS?

TOPAZ?

YOU SAID-

I KNOW WHAT I SAID!!

I KNOW...

BUT... MAYBE...

M-MAYBE IT WAS THE LAST THING HE WORKED ON BEFORE-

BEFORE HE...

...MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.

SO, HOW IS THE GLYPH UNFINISHED? IT SOUNDS EXACTLY LIKE WHAT WE NEED.

IF WE REMOVE THE MAGIC FROM SOMBODY COMPLETELY, IT WOULD BE NO DIFFERENT FROM KILLING THEM.

tap tap

HOW SO?

I MEAN, THEY'D STILL BE ALIVE, BUT THEIR SOUL WOULD BE SUCKED UP TOO.

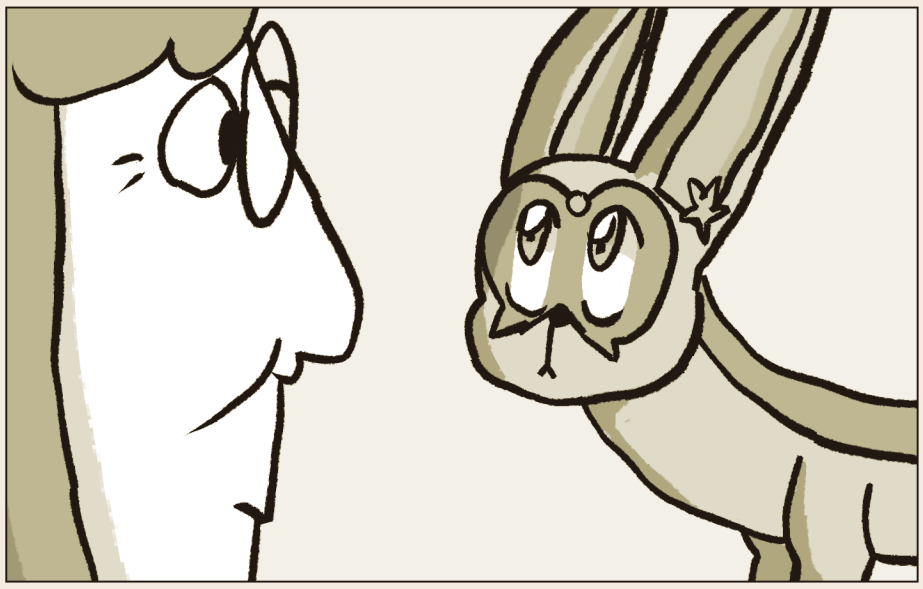
WE NEED TO FIND A WAY TO REMOVE *ONLY* THE CORRUPTED MAGIC.

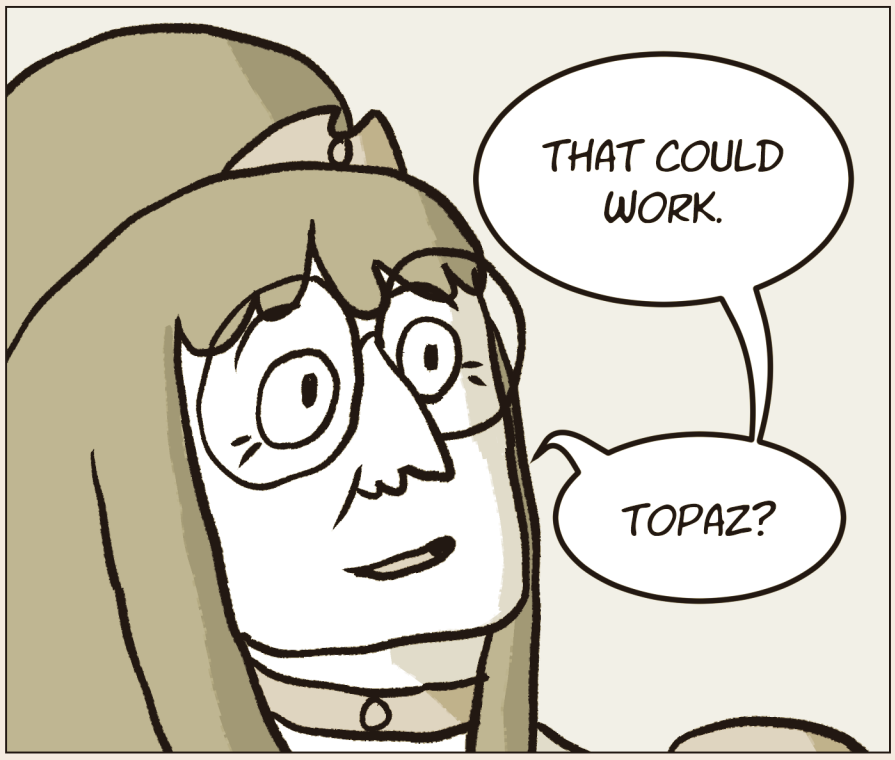
SHIT, SOULS ARE REAL?

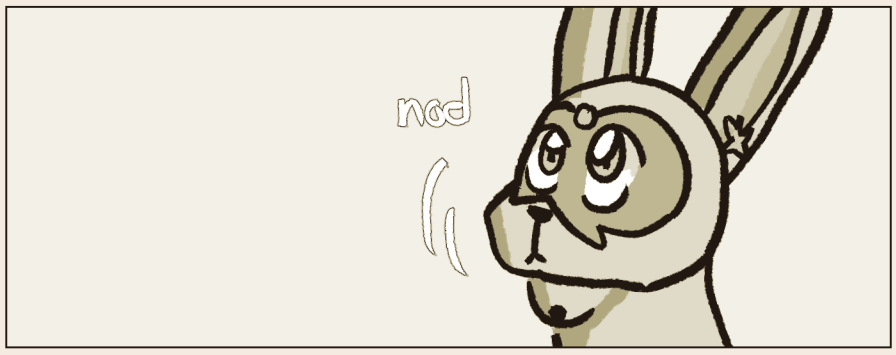
SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

I DON'T KNOW...

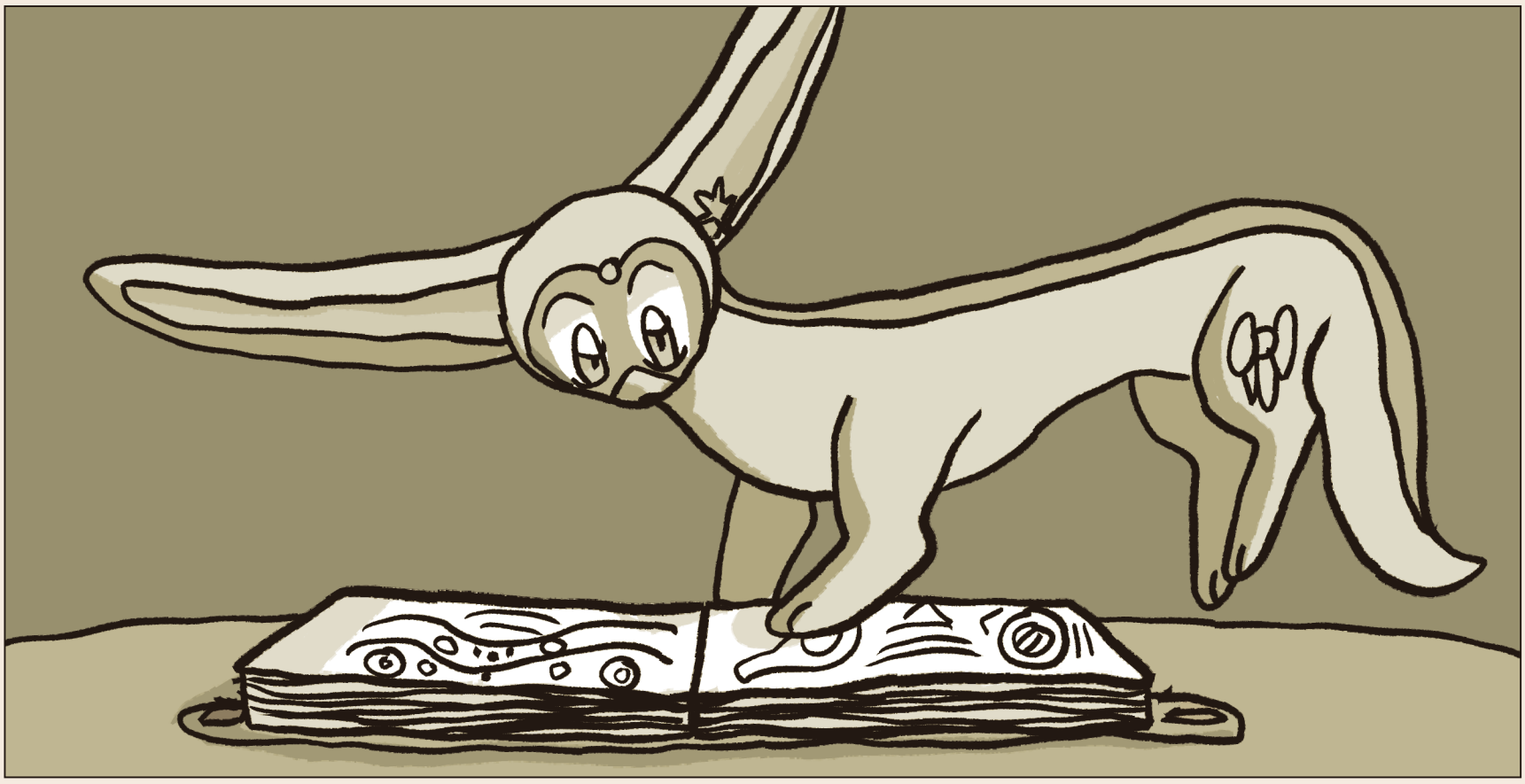
YOU CAN READ THE GLYPHS, RIGHT?
LET'S GO THROUGH THE OTHER ONES IN THE BOOK, MAYBE WE CAN GET SOME IDEAS FROM THEM.




THAT COULD WORK.
TOPAZ?

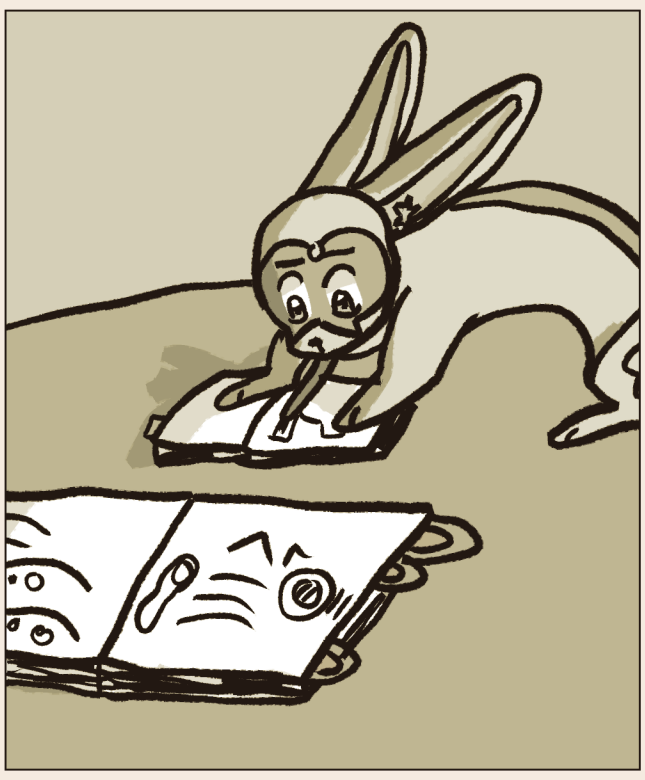

nod

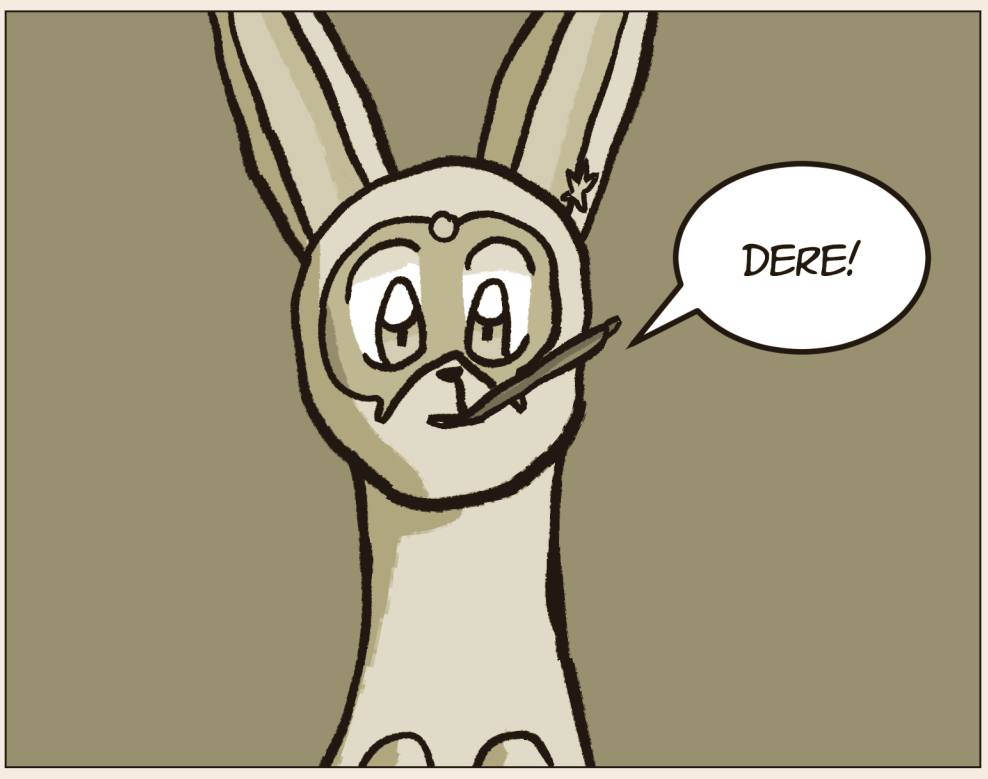
OKAY, SO THE FIRST GLYPH IN THE BOOK ACTIVATES THE BOOK'S MAGIC...



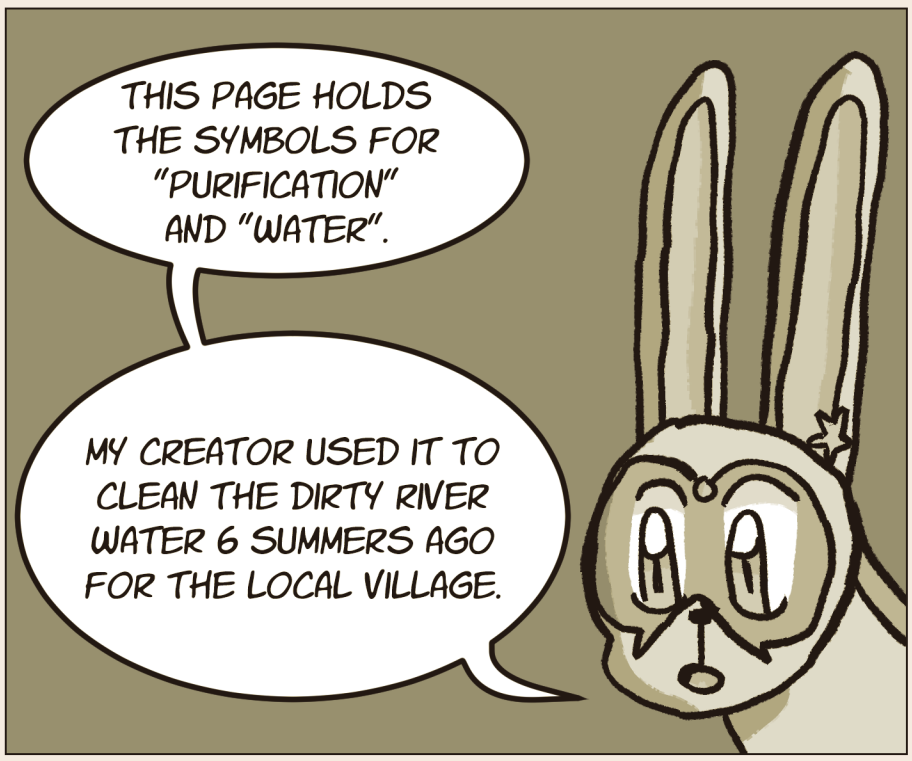
CAN I WRITE IN YOUR LITTLE BOOK?

SURE?

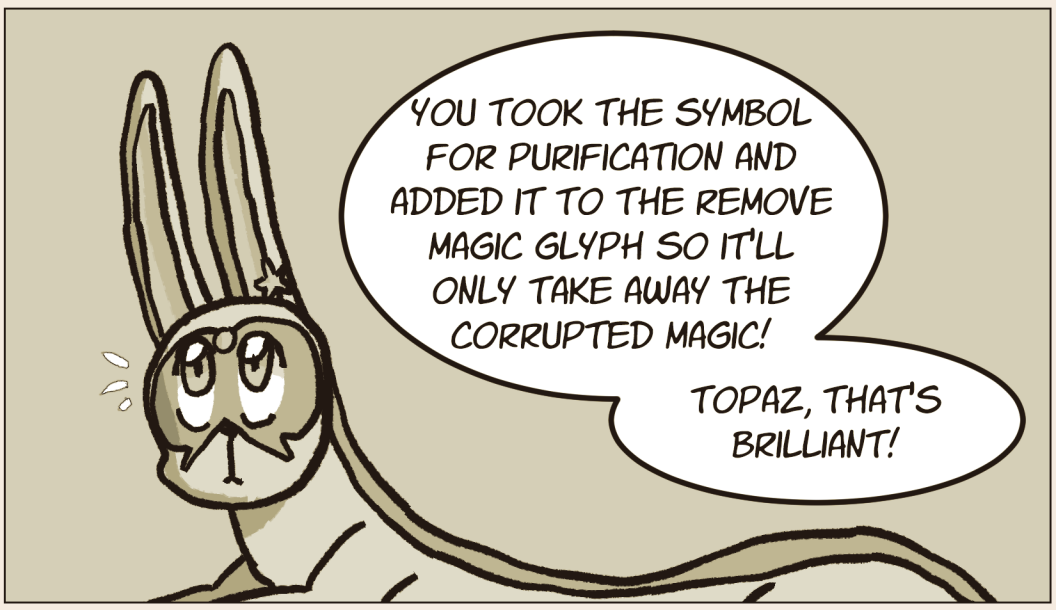


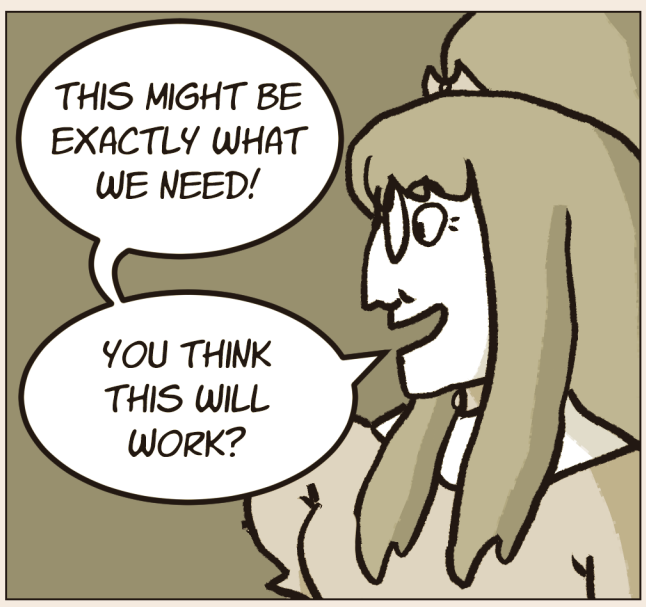

DERE!

SO, UH,
WHAT DOES
THAT ONE MEAN?


THIS PAGE HOLDS
THE SYMBOLS FOR
"PURIFICATION"
AND "WATER".
MY CREATOR USED IT TO
CLEAN THE DIRTY RIVER
WATER 6 SUMMERS AGO
FOR THE LOCAL VILLAGE.

I SEE!


YOU TOOK THE SYMBOL
FOR PURIFICATION AND
ADDED IT TO THE REMOVE
MAGIC GLYPH SO IT'LL
ONLY TAKE AWAY THE
CORRUPTED MAGIC!
TOPAZ, THAT'S
BRILLIANT!


THIS MIGHT BE
EXACTLY WHAT
WE NEED!
YOU THINK
THIS WILL
WORK?

I... DON'T KNOW. I'M SURE MY CREATOR WOULD HAVE FIGURED IT OUT IF IT WERE THIS EASY.

DON'T PUT YOURSELF DOWN, YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT HE COULD OR COULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT OF.

MY CREATOR WAS BRILLIANT, AND INCREDIBLE, AND HUMAN... I'M JUST A HOMUNCULUS THAT CAN'T USE MAGIC...

TOPAZ...

SO WHAT IF YOU CAN'T USE MAGIC? WE COULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN THIS FAR WITHOUT YOU. YOU'RE BRILLIANT IN YOUR OWN WAY.

I THINK IT'S WORTH TRYING, AT LEAST. PLENTY OF BLANK PAGES LEFT IN THIS BOOK IF IT DOESN'T WORK.

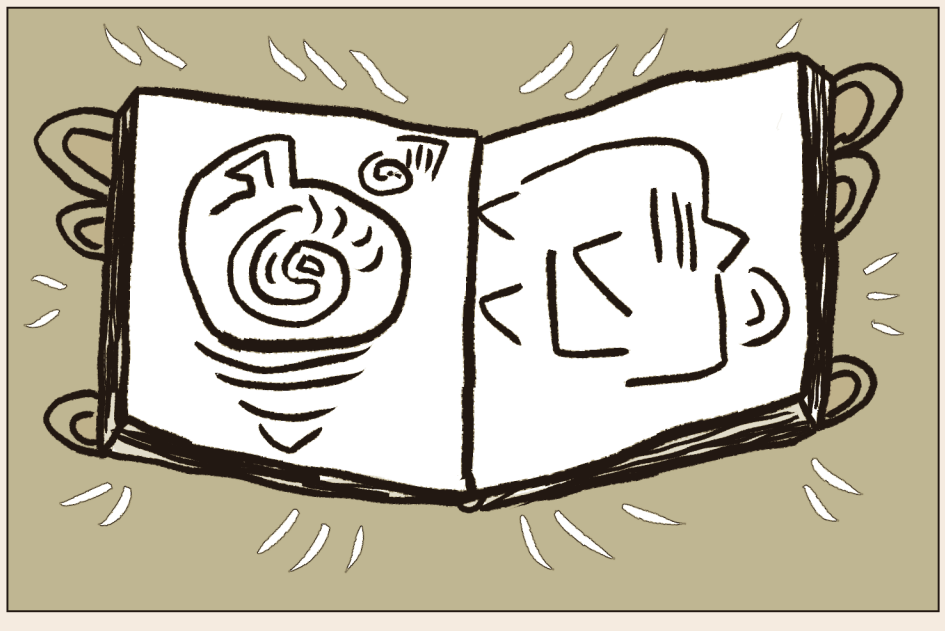
YOU... YOU MEAN IT?

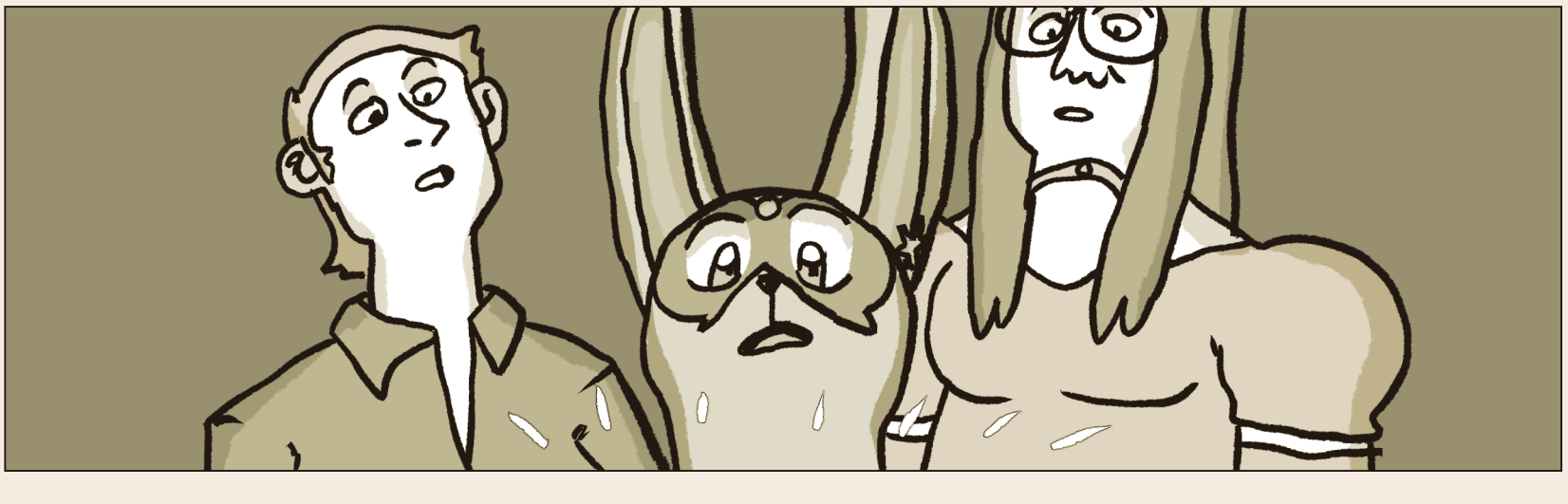
nod

nod

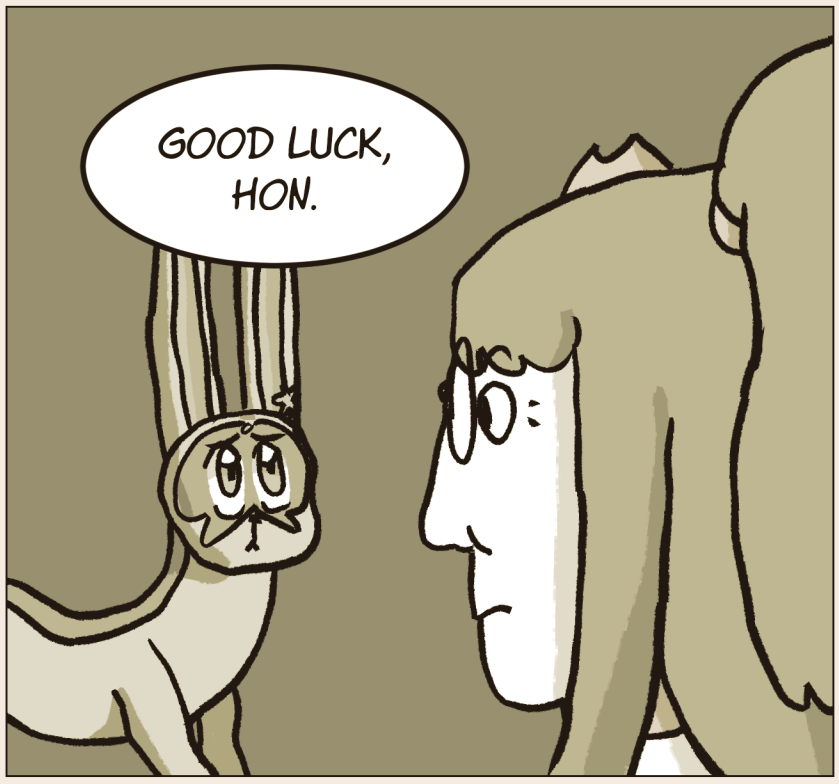
O-OKAY!

LET'S TRY IT!

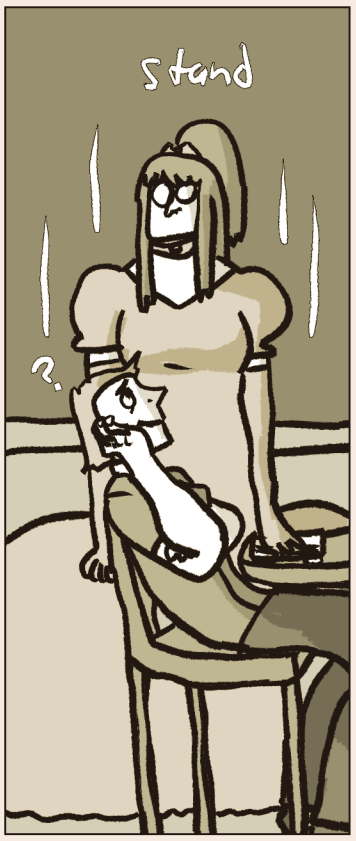


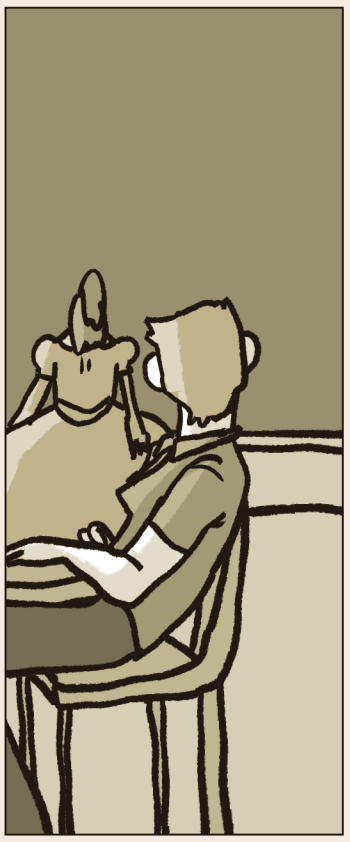


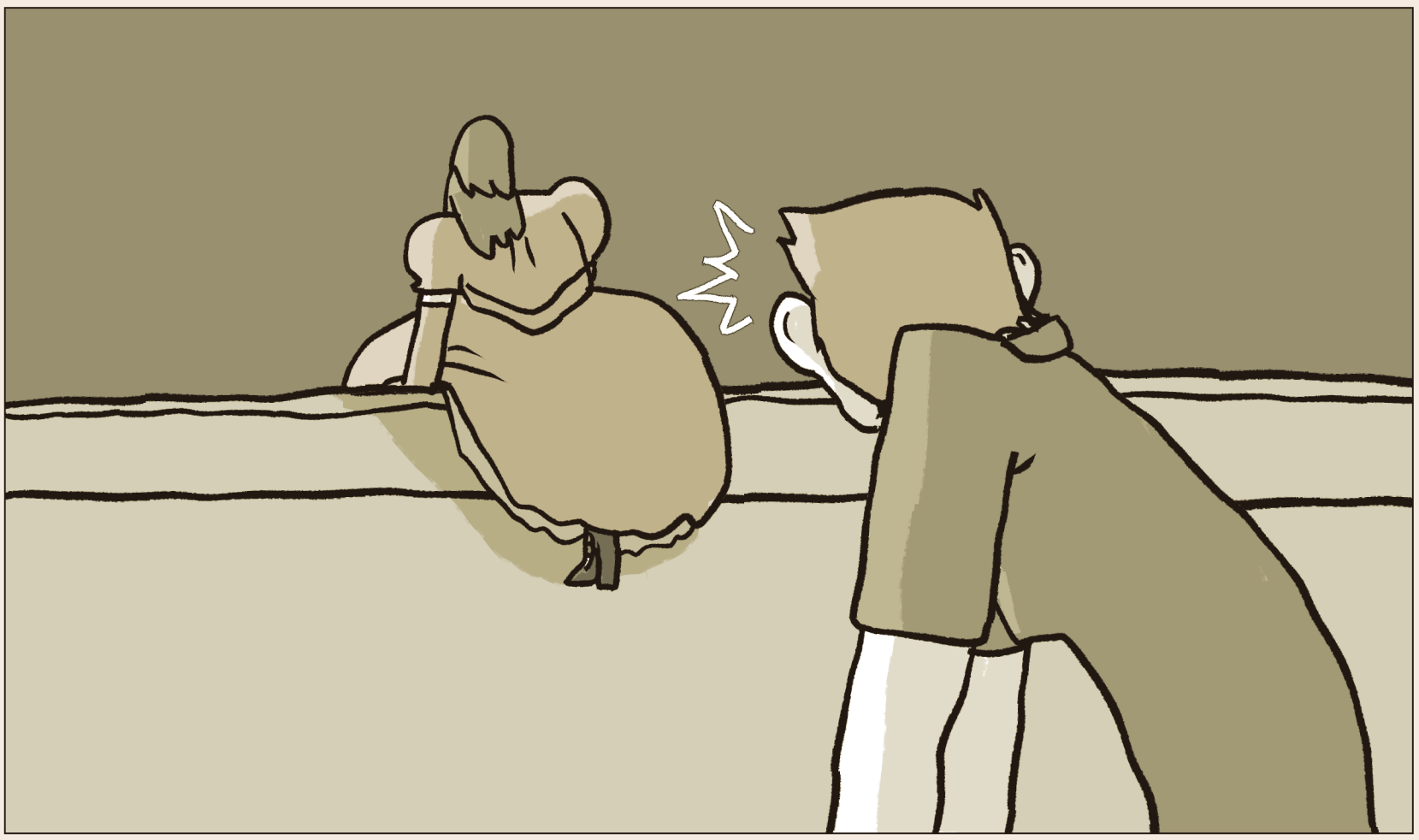
ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT IF IT'S RIGHT...

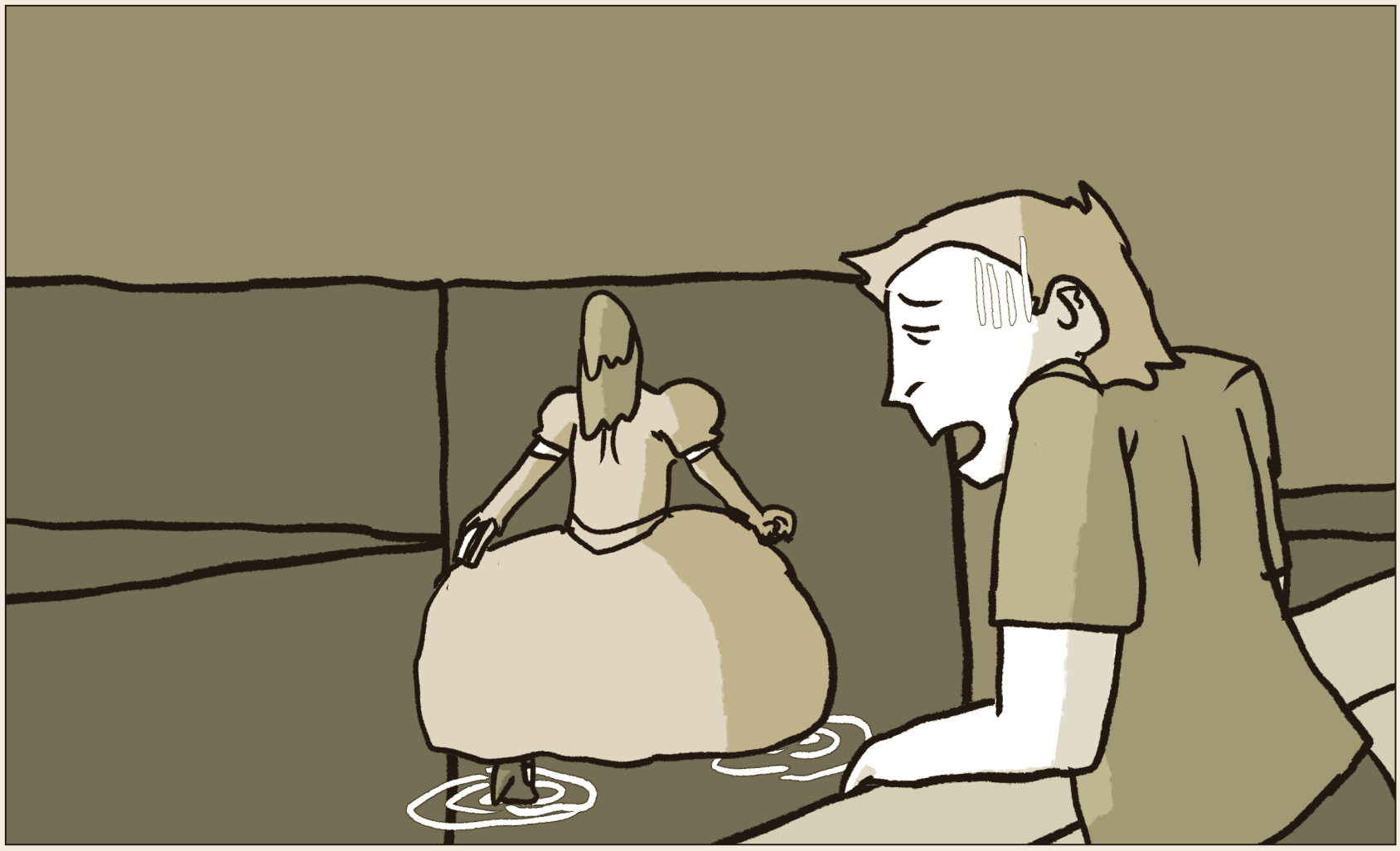

GOOD LUCK, HON.

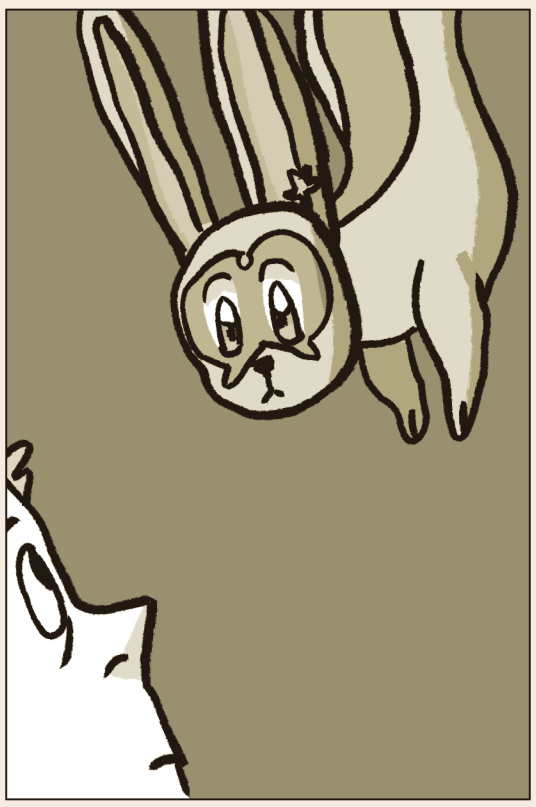
H-HON...?

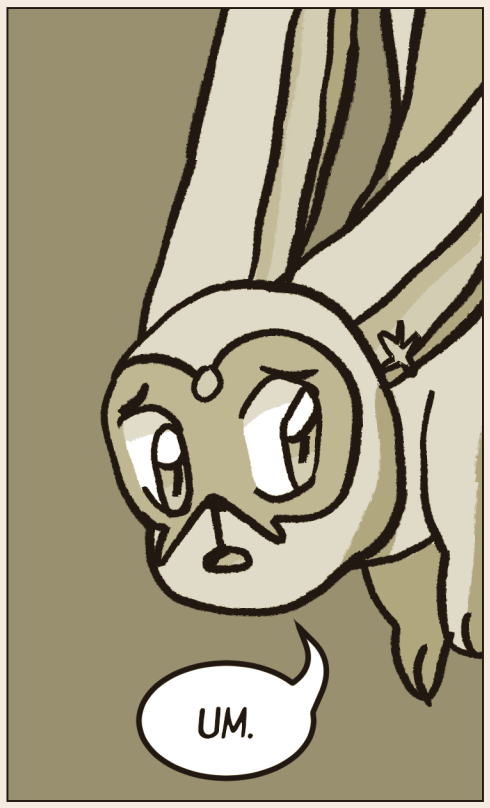

stand
?



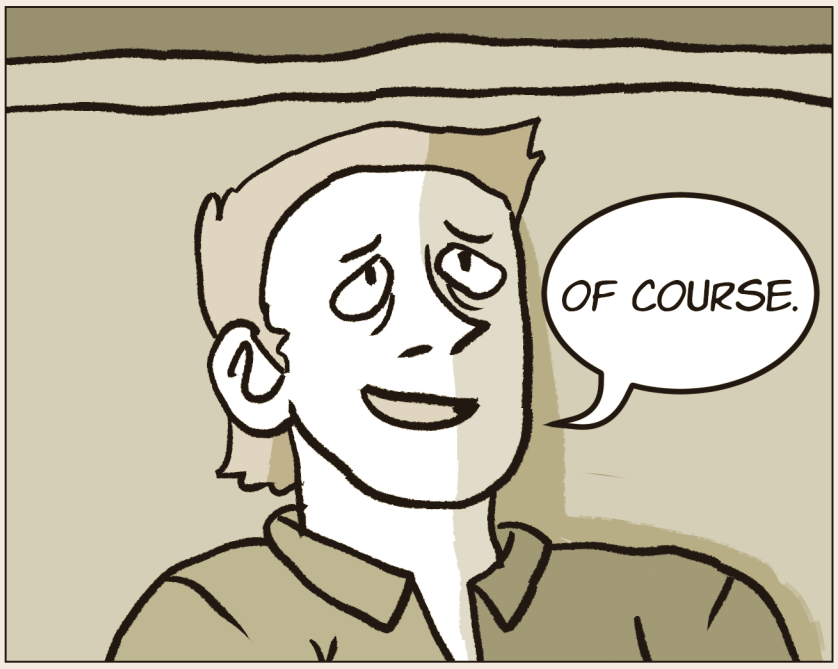







UM.

THANK YOU.
FOR SAYING THOSE NICE THINGS TO ME.


OF COURSE.

SUMMER!
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?!

PLEASE, STAY SAFE.